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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	07/08 China: end US-Taiwan collusion
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/china-beijing-taiwan-joint-chiefs-of-staff-c65148f1ebccf639f3db91cd359086c5
GIST	BEIJING (AP) — China has demanded the U.S. cease military “collusion” with Taiwan during a virtual meeting between the joint chiefs of staff from the two countries whose relationship has grown increasingly fractious.

Gen. Li Zuocheng told Gen. Mark Milley on Thursday that China had “no room for compromise” on issues affecting its “core interests,” which include self-governing Taiwan, [which Beijing claims as its own territory](#) to be annexed by force if necessary.

“China demands the U.S. ... cease reversing history, cease U.S.-Taiwan military collusion and avoid impacting China-U.S. ties and stability in the Taiwan Strait,” Li said.

The Chinese military would “resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he said. “If anyone creates a wanton provocation, they will be met with the firm counterattack from the Chinese people.”

Such language is fairly routine and Li was also quoted in a Defense Ministry news release saying China hoped to “further strengthen dialogue, handle risks, and promote cooperation, rather than deliberately creating confrontation, provoking incidents and becoming mutually exclusive.”

China routinely flies warplanes near Taiwan to advertise its threat to attack, and the island’s Defense Ministry said Chinese air force aircraft crossed the middle line of the Taiwan Strait dividing the two sides on Friday morning. It said measures were taken in response, including the scrambling of Taiwanese jets.

Such “provocative behavior ... has seriously damaged regional peace and stability,” the ministry said. Asked about the incident, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, “This exercise by China is directed at external interference and separatist Taiwan independence forces.”

The meeting between Li and Milley followed [fiery comments](#) by Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe at a regional security conference last month that was also attended by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Wei accused the United States of trying to “hijack” the support of countries in the Asia-Pacific region to turn them against Beijing, saying Washington is seeking to advance its own interests “under the guise of multilateralism.”

At the same meeting in Singapore, Austin said China was causing instability with its claim to Taiwan and its increased military activity in the area.

And in May, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called China the “most serious long-term challenge to the international order” for the United States, with its claims to Taiwan and efforts to dominate the strategic South China Sea, [prompting an angry response from Beijing](#).

The U.S. and its allies have responded with what they term “freedom of navigation” patrols in the South China Sea, prompting angry responses from Beijing.

Despite not having formal diplomatic relations in deference to Beijing, Washington remains Taiwan’s chief ally and supplier of defense weapons. U.S. law requires the government to treat all threats to the island as matters of “grave concern,” although it remains ambiguous on whether the U.S. military would defend Taiwan if it were attacked by China.

The latest round of heated rhetoric comes ahead of a meeting between Blinken and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on Saturday at a gathering of foreign ministers from the G-20 bloc of industrialized nations in Indonesia that is [expected to be overshadowed](#) by disagreements over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

China has refused to criticize Moscow’s aggression or even term it an invasion, [while condemning](#) Western sanctions against Russia and accusing the U.S. and NATO of provoking the conflict.

	Along with Taiwan and the South China Sea, Washington and Beijing are also at odds over trade, human rights and China's policies in Tibet and toward mainly Muslim Turkic minorities in the northwestern region of Xinjiang.
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HEADLINE	07/08 France: 900 firefighters battle huge blaze
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/wildfires-france-fires-evacuations-a8c70206f37cce3495d0b241ba56b5f5
GIST	<p>PARIS (AP) — Hundred of firefighters backed by water-dropping planes battled a large forest fire Friday in southeastern France that has forced the evacuation of nearby villages.</p> <p>Thirteen firefighters have been injured in Bordezac — the village where the fire started. Overall, 18 firefighters have been injured amid several forest fires that have burned for days in the region, according to France Info.</p> <p>Unfavorable weather — drought, heat and strong winds — are complicating efforts to contain the blaze in the Gard region but its fire service said prospects were “more favorable” Friday. Other smaller fires have been extinguished.</p> <p>The service said 620 hectares (more than 1,500 acres) have burned so far. Nearby villages have been evacuated and highways closed as more than 900 firefighters and two planes fought the flames. Laurent Joseph, a top official in the neighboring Bouches-du-Rhone region, told BFM TV that authorities expect to deal with the fire “for several days.”</p> <p>The fire threaten the Cévennes, a mountainous region partially protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site that crosses a large section of southeast France.</p> <p>France's national meteorological service put several neighboring areas on red alert Friday for fire risks and France's Environment Ministry warned citizens in the area to pay careful attention to fire risks.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 Ukraine warns catastrophe in captured city
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-moscow-637f0248ff652c00907ebf35586c1af5
GIST	<p>POKROVSK, Ukraine (AP) — A Ukrainian regional official warned Friday of deteriorating living conditions in a city captured by Russian forces two weeks ago, saying Sievierodonetsk is without water, power or a working sewage system while the bodies of the dead decompose in hot apartment buildings.</p> <p>Gov. Serhiy Haidai said the Russians were unleashing indiscriminate artillery barrages as they try to secure their gains in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk province. Moscow this week claimed full control of Luhansk, but the governor and other Ukrainian officials said their troops retained a small part of the province.</p> <p>“Luhansk hasn't been fully captured even though the Russians have engaged all their arsenal to achieve that goal,” Haidai told The Associated Press. “Fierce battles are going on in several villages on the region's border. The Russians are relying on tanks and artillery to advance, leaving scorched earth.”</p> <p>Russia's forces “strike every building that they think could be a fortified position,” he said. “They aren't stopped by the fact that civilians are left there and they die in their homes and courtyards. They keep firing.”</p> <p>Occupied Sievierodonetsk, meanwhile, “is on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe,” the governor wrote on social media. “The Russians have completely destroyed all the critical infrastructure, and they are unable to repair anything.”</p> <p>Haidai reported last week that about 8,000 residents remained in the city, which had a prewar population of around 100,000. Some Ukrainian officials and soldiers said Russian forces leveled Sievierodonetsk,</p>

Luhansk province's administrative center, before Ukraine's troops were ordered out of the city late last month to avoid their encirclement and capture.

Luhansk is one of two provinces that make up the Donbas, a region of mines and factories where pro-Moscow separatists have fought Ukraine's army for eight years and declared independent republics that Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized before he sent troops into Ukraine.

After asserting full control of Luhansk, Putin said Russian forces would have a chance to rest and recoup, but other parts of eastern Ukraine have come under sustained bombardment. The Russian leader warned Kyiv it should quickly accept Moscow's terms or brace for the worst.

"Everybody should know that largely speaking, we haven't even yet started anything in earnest," Putin said while speaking with leaders of the Kremlin-controlled parliament Thursday.

Ukraine's presidential office said Friday that at least 12 civilians were killed and another 30 wounded by Russian shelling over the last 24 hours. Two cities in Donetsk — the other Donbas province — experienced the heaviest barrage, with six people killed and 21 wounded.

In northeast Ukraine, another four people were killed and nine were wounded in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, where Russian shelling hit residential areas.

Commenting on Putin's ominous statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Russian leader was reacting to statements by Ukraine's government and its Western allies about defeating Russia on the battlefield.

"Russia's potential is so big that just a small part of it has been used in the special military operation," Peskov told reporters. "And so Western statements are utterly absurd and just add to the grief of the Ukrainian people."

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HEADLINE	07/08 Russia prison term for anti-war remarks
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-moscow-government-and-politics-235ad386cb40fe07357425fdfe6a80f2
GIST	<p>A court in Moscow sentenced a municipal council member to seven years in prison Friday for his remarks opposing the war in Ukraine. The unprecedented sentence raises the stakes for Kremlin critics in Russia who speak out against Moscow's invasion of its ex-Soviet neighbor.</p> <p>Alexei Gorinov was found guilty of spreading "knowingly false information" about the Russian military, an offense that carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison under a law the Russian parliament rubber-stamped a week after the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine.</p> <p>The 60-year-old member of Moscow's Krasnoselsky municipal council is the first person sentenced to serve time behind bars for a conviction on that charge, according to Net Freedoms, a legal aid group focused on free speech cases.</p> <p>The two other convictions so far led to a fine and a suspended sentence, the group said. Gorinov, who was arrested in April, is the first elected representative to face charges under the wartime law.</p> <p>Gorinov criticized Russia's military actions in Ukraine at a Moscow municipal council meeting in March. A video available on YouTube shows him voicing skepticism about holding a planned children's art competition in his constituency while "every day children are dying" in Ukraine.</p> <p>Photographs published by Russian media of a Friday court hearing showed Gorinov behind inside a glass-walled defendant's dock and holding up a sign that read, "Do you still need this war?" A bailiff tried to cover the sign with his hands.</p>

	<p>When President Vladimir Putin ordered the Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, a massive wave of outrage and antiwar sentiment swept Russia. Thousands of people protested on the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg daily, and hundreds of thousands signed online petitions opposing the attack.</p> <p>The Kremlin insisted that what it called a “special military operation” in Ukraine had overwhelming public support, and moved swiftly to suppress any criticism. Thousands of protesters were arrested, and dozens of critical media outlets were shut down.</p> <p>Individuals who spoke out publicly against the invasion or accused Russian troops of committing atrocities in Ukraine have been targeted under the new legislation, which outlawed the spread of “false information” about the invasion and disparaging the military.</p> <p>As of Friday, Net Freedoms had counted 68 criminal cases involving false information charges and at least 2,000 misdemeanor cases for the alleged disparagement of the Russian military.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Election officials’ midterm security issues
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-russia-ukraine-voting-presidential-local-89f03587e105290deddc647d43dd6960
GIST	<p>BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Election officials preparing for the upcoming midterms face a myriad of threats, both foreign and domestic, as they look to protect voting systems and run a smooth election while fighting a wave of misinformation that has been undermining public confidence in U.S. elections.</p> <p>The nation’s top state election officials gathered Thursday for the start of their annual summer conference, with a long list of challenges that begins with securing their voting systems.</p> <p>While a top concern heading into the 2020 presidential election was Russia or another hostile nation waging a disruptive cyberattack, the landscape has expanded to include ransomware, politically motivated hackers and insider threats. Over the last year, a small number of security breaches have been reported at local election offices in which authorities are investigating whether office staff improperly accessed or provided improper access to sensitive voting technology.</p> <p>Jen Easterly, who leads the nation’s cybersecurity agency, said Russia, China and North Korea remain “very dynamic and complex cyber threats” and that criminal gangs pushing ransomware were also a concern. But she noted election security officials could not afford to prioritize one over the other.</p> <p>“We can’t just worry about one thing because if we focus too intently on one set of threats, we’re very likely to miss them coming from another direction,” Easterly told reporters, after a series of private meetings with state election officials.</p> <p>The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has been conducting physical assessments for state and local election officials, which includes site visits and reviews of security procedures such as video surveillance and access controls.</p> <p>Physical security has always been a concern but an onslaught of threats since 2020 targeting election officials have added urgency to the effort. State and local election officials have reported being harassed in person and receiving death threats over social media and text message.</p> <p>“We’re seeing an exodus of people in the field. And some of it does relate to just the physical security threats that they’re facing,” said Kim Wyman, who leads election security efforts for the cybersecurity agency. “And what we’re trying to do with this is give them tools to be able to deal with that.”</p> <p>The agency has also issued guidance on how to mitigate insider threats, which emphasizes the importance of chain of custody rules. The guidance also suggests the use of bipartisan teams when accessing sensitive equipment to ensure voting systems are protected.</p>

State election officials have also been focused on boosting cybersecurity defenses at the local level, where staffing and resources are often limited.

In Ohio, Secretary of State Frank LaRose recently announced a third wave of security requirements for the state's county election boards, which includes increased video surveillance for voting equipment and more comprehensive security reviews of county systems.

"It's constant vigilance," LaRose said Thursday. "The threat is constantly emerging. The threat is constantly changing. And so we're evolving with it and making sure that our guard is up."

Election security became a national focus after the 2016 presidential election, when Russia probed state voter registration systems across the country looking for vulnerabilities.

In response, the Obama administration designated election systems as "critical infrastructure" -- on par with the nation's banks, dams and nuclear power plants. This freed up resources and funds for election officials, and a concerted effort was made to improve communications and intelligence sharing between the federal government and the states.

But the 2020 presidential election brought an unprecedented wave of false claims and conspiracy theories surrounding voting equipment and election procedures as former President Donald Trump sought to explain his loss to Democrat Joe Biden. Supporters and allies of Trump have been traveling across the country for more than a year claiming the election was stolen and spreading misinformation that has further increased distrust in U.S. elections.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed.

But the false claims have persisted and have led to suspected security breaches at local election offices a handful of states.

Earlier this year, the clerk in Mesa County, Colorado, was indicted for a security breach at her election office. Authorities say Clerk Tina Peters allowed unauthorized people access to voting equipment and an unauthorized copy was made of the county's voting system that was later posted online. Peters has denied any wrongdoing.

In Colorado, Secretary of State Jena Griswold pushed for legislative changes this year to tighten security measures surrounding voting systems and increase penalties for those attempting to access them.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Seattle office workers 38% back in office
SOURCE	https://www.ncwlife.com/news/northwest/downtown-seattle-office-workers-back-in-offices-at-less-than-half-pre-covid-rate/article_cc529439-d5e7-5c49-a497-7bd1f35ea06f.html
GIST	<p>(The Center Square) – Although the COVID-19 pandemic is largely in the rearview mirror, office workers in downtown Seattle are still coming back at half the pre-pandemic rate.</p> <p>Downtown Seattle Association has been releasing weekly statistics charts tracking the percent recovered compared to an equivalent week in 2019 since March 1, 2020.</p> <p>The latest update from June 26 shows office workers are back to work downtown at 38% from the same time period two years prior.</p> <p>James Sido, the director of media relations at Downtown Seattle Association, said the numbers shouldn't alarm people at first glance.</p>

"[The chart] indicates we're around 40 to the high 30s for the percentage of office workers returning compared to 2019 levels at the same time periods," Sido said in an email to The Center Square. "And at last check, those numbers are higher than LA and San Francisco."

The three biggest companies located around the downtown Seattle area, Amazon, Microsoft and Google, shifted away from working in their offices in downtown Seattle after the city shut down two years ago,

According to Sido, a good number of Amazon employees are back in their offices in downtown Seattle now.

"Anecdotally, you can tell that a sizable amount of Amazon employees are back in the office just by the size of the lines during the lunch hour at restaurants in and near the HQ," Sido said.

He went on to explain that the chart identifies an office worker as "having been downtown at least three days per week," and that "it's reasonable to believe some of that population could very well be people coming into the office one to two days per week and they're not yet counted in that office population, so the number is likely higher than 40%."

The rate of office workers returning to work downtown is below 50%. King County Assessor John Wilson said in May that the parts of Seattle experiencing double-digit spikes in property valuation were in proximity to Amazon, Microsoft and Google-owned buildings.

If the companies are not efficiently utilizing their offices, a shift to different locations could be possible. However, real estate agent Junior Torres doesn't think so.

"With home prices stabilizing to more normal levels, properties are likely to sit on the market a little longer than they have over the past two years," Torres said in an email to The Center Square. "We are seeing existing home and condo sales drop month over month and are likely to see a continuation of this. Given the changing market, it is unlikely that we will see a large influx of more residential units in the downtown area."

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HEADLINE	07/07 Large homeless camp fire near I-5, I-90
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/large-fire-burns-at-homeless-encampment-in-seattle-near-i-5-and-i-90
GIST	SEATTLE — A large fire at a homeless encampment in south Seattle burned overnight near I-5 and I-90. Flames broke out at 10th Ave South and South Dearborn Street around 1:30 a.m. Thursday. KOMO News learned propane tanks may have exploded at the site. There is no word on injuries at this time.
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HEADLINE	07/08 G20 diplomats fail unity over Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/nato-russia-ukraine-boris-johnson-g-20-summit-covid-a7ac635f110548f3ef00b01f02cf5c69
GIST	NUSA DUA, Indonesia (AP) — Deeply divided top diplomats from the world's richest and largest developing nations failed to find common ground Friday over Russia's war in Ukraine and how to deal with its global impacts, leaving prospects for future cooperation in the forum uncertain. At talks that were were knocked off balance by two unrelated and unexpected political developments, including the shocking assassination of a former Japanese prime minister, far from the Indonesian resort of

Bali where they were meeting, Group of 20 foreign ministers heard an emotional plea for unity and an end to the war from their Indonesian host.

Yet, consensus remained elusive amid deepening East-West splits driven by China and Russia on one side and the United States and Europe on the other. There was no group photo taken nor a final communique issued as has been done in previous years, and acrimony appeared pervasive, especially between Russia and Western participants.

Although they were present in the same room at the same time for the first time since the Ukraine war began, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pointedly ignored each other.

Lavrov walked out of the proceedings at least twice: once when his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock spoke at the opening session and again just before Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was to speak by video at the second session, according to a Western diplomat present.

The meeting opened only hours after [British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced his resignation](#) Thursday, prompting his Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to depart Bali, and was just underway when [former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was shot](#). Abe later died of his wounds.

Both Johnson and Abe are well known to the G-20 family, having participated in numerous similar conferences and leaders' summits in the past. One goal of Friday's meeting was to lay the groundwork for the upcoming G-20 summit that Indonesia will host in November.

Many, if not all, of the participants [expressed their shock at Abe's shooting](#) that occurred as they were holding the first of two plenary sessions on the importance of restoring confidence in multilateralism and upholding the global rules-based order.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi had urged the group — which included Lavrov, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Blinken and several European counterparts — to overcome mistrust for the sake of a planet confronting multiple challenges from the coronavirus to climate change as well as Ukraine.

"The world has yet to recover from the pandemic but we are already confronted with another crisis: the war in Ukraine," Marsudi said. "The ripple effects are being felt globally on food, on energy and physical space."

She noted that poor and developing countries now face the brunt of fuel and [grain shortages resulting from the war in Ukraine](#) and said that the G-20 has a responsibility to step up and deal with the matter to ensure the rules-based global order remains relevant.

The Ukraine war has shaken that order, she said, as Lavrov appeared to shuffle papers without expression at his seat in between the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Mexico.

"Honestly, we cannot deny that it has become more difficult for the world to sit together," Marsudi said. She added plaintively: "The world is watching us, so we cannot fail."

But after the meeting was over Marsudi could not point to any agreements reached by all participants, although she said there had been broad concern about food and energy disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine. She added that only "some countries expressed condemnation of the act of invasion."

Indeed, although they sat around the same large conference table neither Lavrov nor Blinken spoke to each other.

“You know, it was not us who abandoned all contacts,” Lavrov told reporters after the first session. “It was the United States. That’s all I can say. And we are not running after anybody suggesting meetings. If they don’t want to talk, it’s their choice.”

Asked why there had been no group photo, Lavrov snapped: “I didn’t invite anyone to pose for a photo together with me.”

“It’s obvious that they used the G-20 for goals that weren’t envisaged when it was created,” he said.

Shortly thereafter, Blinken took direct aim at the Russian delegation, accusing Moscow in the second G-20 session of blocking millions of tons of grain in Ukrainian ports and causing food insecurity in large parts of the world, according to a Western diplomat present.

Lavrov was not there for Blinken’s comments and his stand-in began Russia’s intervention by telling the group she did not have prepared remarks, according to the diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the closed-door meeting.

U.S. officials had said they were determined not to allow distractions to divert attention from what they believe should be the primary focuses of the Bali conference: the disruption to world food and energy supplies caused by [Russia’s war in Ukraine](#), blaming Moscow for it, and marshalling a response to halt shortages that are already [wreaking havoc](#) in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

U.S. officials had hinted there would be no group communique as there has been in previous years when the group had produced joint statements on key issues like terrorism, transnational crime, climate and economic matters that have been viewed as blueprints for global action.

U.S. officials said it was less important for the G-20 to present a unified stance as an entity than it would be for smaller blocs of countries and individual nations to speak out and take action.

The competition for support among the sides has been fierce. Wang and Lavrov each stopped in various Asian capitals on their way to Bali, drumming up support for various Chinese and Russian positions and fortifying their ties among non-allied nations.

Blinken, the French, Germans and Brits, meanwhile, all arrived in Bali from two Western-oriented and organized gatherings in Europe last week: [the G-7](#) and [NATO summits](#) at which there was little sign of rancor or debate and unity on Ukraine was assured.

With its broader membership, including countries like host Indonesia and large developing nations like India, Brazil, South Africa and others, the G-20 is far more diverse, skeptical of Western intentions and more open to entreaties and offers from big neighbors like China and Russia and more vulnerable to their threats.

Attempting to ply a middle route, this year’s G-20 president, Indonesia, has tried to bridge what gaps are possible, laying out an agenda that is not inherently divisive or political. The country has sought to remain neutral in dealing with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and [President Joko Widodo has been guarded](#) in his comments.

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HEADLINE	07/08 Taiwan slams ‘provocative’ China
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-military-holds-exercises-around-taiwan-berates-united-states-2022-07-08/
GIST	TAIPEI/BEIJING, July 8 (Reuters) - Chinese fighter jets crossed the median line of the sensitive Taiwan Strait on Friday in what the island's government slammed as a provocation, as a senior U.S. senator visited Taipei for a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen that China condemned.

China claims democratically-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and has ramped up military and political pressure to try and force the island to accept Chinese rule.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said the Chinese aircraft "intentionally crossed the median line of the strait in a provocative move, which has seriously damaged regional peace and stability".

It said Taiwan's air force "forcefully expelled" the Chinese aircraft and deployed ground-to-air missiles to "monitor" the situation.

The median line is an unofficial buffer between China and Taiwan and normally military aircraft stick to their respective sides, but on occasion China's air force crosses over it, as happened in 2020 when U.S. officials were visiting Taiwan.

Several Chinese fighter jets crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait on Friday in the northern part of the waterway, a Taiwan source briefed on the matter told Reuters, adding the aircraft did not enter Taiwanese airspace.

The source said it was rare for Chinese aircraft to cross the unofficial buffer, especially from Taiwan's northwest.

The aircraft "flew straight across" the median line and then "circled around" carrying out tactical operations, the person said, adding that Taiwan scrambled fighter jets to intercept the Chinese planes.

"It was a clear message of provocation," the person said, citing Friday's visit to Taipei by U.S. Senator Rick Scott, a senior Republican who chairs the National Republican Senatorial Committee and sits on the Senate's Armed Services Committee.

Earlier on Friday, China's military said it had held joint combat readiness exercises, patrols and combat drills in the sea and airspace around Taiwan.

The exercises, announced by the Eastern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army, were organised in response to "collusion and provocations" by the United States and Taiwan, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said in a statement.

'THWART INTERFERENCE'

China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, bristles at any form of official interaction between U.S. and Taiwanese officials and routinely describes Taiwan as the most sensitive and important issue in its relations with Washington.

Chinese spokesman Wu said Scott's visit to Taiwan had seriously undermined Sino-U.S. relations and escalated tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

"The Chinese People's Liberation Army is ready for war at all times, and will take all necessary measures to resolutely thwart the interference of external forces and the secessionist attempts of 'Taiwan independence'."

After meeting with President Tsai in Taipei on Friday, Scott told reporters he believes that "the world has changed" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We all have to put ourselves in a position that we can make sure we defend the freedom we all believe in," he said. "I do think it would be helpful if Taiwan participated in RIMPAC and I hope that's what happens in the future."

The Rim of the Pacific exercise, known as RIMPAC, is billed as the world's largest international maritime exercise, with the latest one kicking off late last month with 26 nations participating in drills around Hawaii and southern California.

	<p>Taiwan's government has denounced Chinese pressure, saying only its 23 million people can decide their future.</p> <p>U.S.-China tensions are high over a number of issues including Taiwan, the South China Sea, trade tariffs and Beijing's refusal to openly criticise Russian President Vladimir Putin over the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken is due to meet with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on Saturday at the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Bali.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 India ramps up Russia oil imports
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/india/why-india-ramped-up-russian-oil-imports-easing-pressure-moscow-2022-07-08/
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI, July 8 (Reuters) - Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the United States and its allies have leaned on countries to buy less Russian oil in a bid to punish Moscow for its aggression.</p> <p>Indian refiners have done the opposite, snapping up more Russian crude while the government explores ways to protect domestic oil firms from punishment should they fall foul of sanctions.</p> <p>The result has been a huge leap in volumes from Russia. In May, India imported 819,000 barrels per day (bpd), from 277,000 bpd in April and 33,000 bpd a year ago. Russia is now the second biggest supplier to India, replacing Saudi Arabia, while Iraq continues to be the largest.</p> <p>While the increase in volumes is known, some of the ways in which India has communicated its strategy on Russian oil purchases to key players and offered assurances to the companies involved have not been reported.</p> <p>European countries and the United States have imposed heavy sanctions on Russia since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24. While New Delhi has called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine, it has not explicitly condemned the invasion, which Russia says is a "special military operation".</p> <p>An Indian government official said India plans to continue with purchases of Russian oil, available at a discount that is now narrowing. "If India stops buying oil from Russia, the entire world will be chasing the same pieces of oil and that will further push up oil prices," he said.</p> <p>Government and refinery officials have said India's main reason for buying Russian crude is commercial.</p> <p>After China, India has done more than any country to compensate for the drop in demand for Russian oil from elsewhere, undermining Western efforts to isolate Moscow and hasten an end to the war in Ukraine. read more</p> <p>The officials say New Delhi wants to avoid repeating what it sees as the mistakes of the past: abiding by sanctions on Iran and winding down oil imports, only to see its main regional rival China continue unpunished and benefit economically.</p> <p>"India has the attitude that if China is buying, why wouldn't we?" said Robin Mills, chief executive of energy consultancy Qamar Energy.</p> <p>"India doesn't want to be in the same position again when China continued to buy Iranian oil and India stopped it."</p>

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government values good relations with Washington and the West, Indian officials say domestic needs come first and argue that Russia has been a better friend than the United States in energy cooperation.

Economic necessity is also behind the shift. Indian refiners have bought Russian oil at a lower cost although the discounts are now shrinking, while New Delhi often takes a dig at oil production strategies of OPEC. Inflation is meanwhile biting hard.

Indian energy minister Hardeep Singh Puri often blames OPEC for holding barrels back from the market, and said high prices were not good for producers or consumers. "We have to look after our own interests," Puri said last month.

U.S. President Joe Biden has described India's energy policy response to the Ukraine crisis as "somewhat shaky".

Indian officials counter that what refiners are doing is legal and some European countries are still buying Russian oil and gas. Executives at state-owned and private refineries do not expect purchases of Russian crude to slow any time soon.

Last month, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar posed the question at a conference: "Why are Indian money and funds coming from India seen as funding the war (in Ukraine), when Europe also buys gas from Russia?"

Referring to U.S. sanctions on Iranian and Venezuelan crude, he said: "They (Europe and the U.S.) have squeezed every other source of oil we have and then say you will not go to the market and get the best deal for the people; it's not a fair approach".

RUSSIAN OIL ASSETS

In April, India's oil secretary, Pankaj Jain, called a meeting of state-run firms to discuss the possibility of buying Russian oil and gas assets, said three company officials present, at a time when Western firms were looking to pull out.

The proposal floated was to create a company 51% owned by the government, with the remainder distributed among state-run firms as a way of fending off the threat of secondary U.S. sanctions should they be imposed.

India's oil ministry did not respond to a Reuters e-mail seeking comment.

The government is yet to move forward with the proposal, partly because the first right of refusal for Russian oil assets dropped by Western firms lay with Russian oil firms, and as the threat of secondary sanctions had receded for now, the company officials said.

But the idea would put India, the world's third biggest oil consumer and importer, at odds with Washington and its allies, who want a united global response to isolate Moscow.

Nevertheless, private and state refiners in India say they are in regular contact with government officials, apprising them of Russian oil purchase plans and receiving assurances that should problems arise, New Delhi would step in and try and resolve them.

They see no immediate reason for the vastly expanded Russian oil purchases to be reduced, although refinery and government officials stressed that commercial, and not political considerations were paramount.

The steep discounts that Indian refiners enjoyed soon after the Ukraine war began - of \$20-30 per barrel - have narrowed significantly as Russia finds new markets for its oil. They stand at just \$7-8 on delivered basis, still cheaper than viable alternatives.

Some refinery officials said slimmer margins could be eroded further as insurance and freight costs to move Russian oil had risen significantly.

"If Middle Eastern producers reduce official prices for their crude, then we may have to rethink purchases of Russian oil," one said. Saudi Arabia raised crude prices to Asian buyers to near record levels this month.

A possible cap on how much buyers can offer Russia for its oil discussed at a recent G7 summit could work in India's favour were it to happen, but Indian officials said they would only comply if all importers paid the same price. It is not clear whether the proposal is workable, however.

RELIABLE RUSSIAN SUPPORT

Russia has also helped India in other fields of energy.

While Western companies' attempts to build nuclear power plants in India have stumbled, two Russian-built reactors have been in commercial operation in Kudankulam, southern India, since 2014 and 2017.

Construction on two more started in 2017 and Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed in 2018 to build six more.

Two years earlier, the involvement of both men was instrumental in getting the acquisition of Indian refiner Essar by a consortium led by Kremlin oil giant Rosneft over the line.

The \$13 billion price tag for the debt-laden enterprise made it the biggest foreign acquisition in India at the time and Russia's largest outbound deal.

Also, Russia has long supported India internationally on critical issues including Kashmir, a territory disputed between India, Pakistan and China, and is its most important source of foreign military hardware.

That all means New Delhi is reluctant to put U.S. interests ahead of those of Russia, especially after it felt it was harmed economically by sanctions on oil from Iran and Venezuela and potash, a key ingredient in fertilisers, from Belarus.

Under Modi's nationalist government, India has pursued an assertive foreign policy, standing up to China in a two-year military border standoff and rejecting Western criticism of domestic policies some say are authoritarian and divisive.

Modi has a particularly close eye on China, experts said.

"It is not in the interest of India or others who have identified China as the major systemic rival to move away from Russia," said former diplomat Ashok Sajjanhar, although he added India's ties with Washington and its allies remained the most important.

The United States has offered to sell more defence equipment and oil to India, for example, and New Delhi joined a U.S.-led trade partnership Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity.

India is a member of the Quad alliance, which links it with the United States, Japan and Australia. India also signed a free trade agreement with Australia, talks for which initially began in 2011.

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HEADLINE	07/08 More Russian men avoid military service
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/more-russian-men-look-avoid-military-service-some-lawyers-rights-groups-say-2022-07-08/

LONDON, July 8 (Reuters) - Danila Davydov said he left Russia within weeks of the Kremlin sending troops into Ukraine because he feared having to fight in a war he doesn't support.

The 22-year-old digital artist who had been living in St Petersburg said that as the conflict dragged on he was concerned that Russia could place pressure on young people like him to serve in the military.

"I didn't want to go to war or go to prison, so I decided to leave," Davydov told Reuters from Kazakhstan, where he said he's currently working.

He is among what some lawyers and rights advocates say is an increased number of young Russian men looking to avoid the country's mandatory military service since the conflict with Ukraine began in late February, illustrating the ambivalence in Russian society to the conflict.

Some young men are leaving the country while others are seeking advice on obtaining exemptions or alternative avenues, or simply ignoring their summons in the hopes that authorities don't pursue them, according to Reuters interviews with seven men currently seeking to avoid serving in the military as well as five lawyers and rights advocates.

That is despite the risk of facing fines or up to two years in prison - in a country where military service is mandatory for young men aged 18 to 27. One man told Reuters that refusing to fight has led to tensions with family members who believe military service is a young man's duty.

Davydov said that he was able to take himself off the military service register and leave the country because he had a job offer abroad. He wants to return home one day, he said, but laments it may not be any time soon: "I love Russia and miss it very much."

The Kremlin referred questions to the defence ministry, which didn't respond to a request for comment about how widespread draft avoidance is and whether it is impacting the function of the Russian armed forces. The ministry, on its website, says that "service in the army and navy is the honourable duty of a Russian citizen that bestows considerable advantages in the future."

Moscow says it is conducting a special military operation and that it is going as planned. Russian President Vladimir Putin has lauded those who fight for Russia as "heroes" who are saving Russian-speakers from persecution and foiling what he says is a Western plan to destroy Russia. In March, he described Russians whose thoughts were more in line with the West than Russia as "traitors." [read more](#)

On Feb 24 Russia sent thousands of troops into Ukraine, embarking on Europe's biggest ground invasion since World War Two. Following Russia's withdrawal of troops from near Kyiv, the war has slowed to a grinding artillery contest with Moscow focused on taking territory in eastern Ukraine.

Putin is betting on a professional army that the West says has sustained significant losses in the war. If the army cannot recruit enough contract soldiers, Putin's options would include using conscripts, mobilising Russian society or scaling back his ambitions.

Although Putin has repeatedly publicly said conscripts should not fight in the Ukraine conflict, the defence ministry in early March said some already have. Last month, a military prosecutor told the upper house of parliament that about 600 conscripts had been drawn into the conflict and that around a dozen officers had been disciplined as a result. [read more](#)

Ukraine has imposed martial law: men aged 18 to 60 are banned from leaving the country. Kyiv says it will fight to the end against what it casts as an unprovoked imperial-style land grab.

'MANY PEOPLE ARE SCARED'

Since Peter the Great transformed Russia into a major European power, its rulers have often relied on conscription as part of Russia's vast military, one of the world's biggest fighting forces. Men of military age must serve a year as a conscript. Russia calls up around 260,000 annually in a twice-yearly draft.

Russia's combined armed forces total about 900,000, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). [read more](#)

Avoiding the draft is a well-established practice, including via legitimate routes like deferring service by studying and claiming medical exemptions. But recent months have seen an increase in young men seeking help on how to do so, according to four lawyers and rights advocates groups that offer advice and legal aid to such young men. That has been mostly from people in major cities like Moscow and St Petersburg, according to two of those.

One group that provides free legal advice called Release is co-run by Dmitry Lutsenko, a Russian now living in Cyprus. He said the membership of a public Telegram group for those seeking advice on how to avoid conscription that the group runs has increased to more than 1,000 people, up from about 200 prior to the conflict.

Another rights group, called Citizen. Army. Law, focuses on advice to people seeking alternative types of military service, which involves working in a state-run organisation such as a hospital instead of the military. The group said it had seen a ten times increase in the number of people asking about alternative service to more than 400 this year, compared to about 40 during the equivalent period last year. "Many people are scared. They don't want to go into an army that is fighting," said Sergei Krivenko, who heads the organisation.

Lawyer Denis Koksharov, chairman of the Prizyvnik legal association, said that earlier in the conflict he had seen a roughly 50% increase in the number of people seeking advice on avoiding military service, without specifying numbers. He added that the number of requests had since declined and more recently the organisation has seen an increase in young men wanting to volunteer to fight.

Koksharov attributed the fluctuation to people becoming accustomed to the current situation and an increase in people "displaying patriotism."

MISSING HOME

Fyodor Strelin, a 27-year old from St Petersburg, said he had protested against the war in the immediate aftermath of the invasion but decided to leave Russia in late February.

Now in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, Strelin said he had previously avoided the draft after securing an exemption last year due to shortsightedness but chose to leave Russia due to concern about a general mobilisation. "I miss my home and for now I feel that I lost my place in life," he said.

Some young men who have been summoned for military service are ignoring the call in the hopes that the authorities get sufficient take up elsewhere, according to six of the young men, lawyers and rights advocates that Reuters spoke to.

Kirill, a 26-year-old from southern Russia who works in technology, said that he received a conscription summons in April followed by a phone call in May requesting he attend a medical but has not responded because he doesn't support Russia's operation in Ukraine.

That has caused tension with some family and friends who back the war and believe everyone should do their service, said Kirill, who asked his surname not be used. "The people in Ukraine are like brothers. I know many people in the country and I can't support these actions," he added.

In June, police visited his home when he was out and asked his mother why he was avoiding his military service, according to Kirill. Reuters wasn't able to corroborate Kirill's account. Reuters attempted to reach the Russian interior ministry's media relations office. The person answering the phone provided another number that went unanswered on multiple attempts. Reuters also sent an email but received an automated response saying it was undeliverable.

WAR AND PEACE

	<p>Kyiv and Western allies estimate that Russia has lost at least as many men as the 15,000 Soviets killed in the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-1989. Moscow has not updated its official casualty figure since late March, when it said that 1,351 Russian soldiers had been killed and thousands more wounded since the start of the military campaign in Ukraine.</p> <p>There are signs that Russia is looking for more men to fight. In May, Putin signed a law that removed the upper age limit of 40 for people wanting to enlist in the Russian military. Lawmakers at the time said the change was to attract experienced people with specialism in areas such as advanced military equipment and engineering.</p> <p>One Russian man in his 30s, who requested he not be identified, told Reuters he was summoned by telephone to report to a military office on the pretext of clarifying some personal details. While there, he was questioned by an unidentified man in military clothing about his previous military service and offered 300,000 roubles (\$5,000) a month if he signed up to fight in Ukraine, he said.</p> <p>Reuters was unable to independently verify his account.</p> <p>The man said he declined the offer because he was not a professional soldier and had never fired a shot since completing his service.</p> <p>“What use is 300,000 roubles to a dead man?” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 Food insecurity hits rich countries
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/food-insecurity-hits-rich-countries-as-inflation-makes-basics-unaffordable-for-many-11657272602
GIST	<p>LONDON—Rampant food inflation is roiling the world’s least-developed nations. It is also hitting poor people in rich countries.</p> <p>Matsentralen Norge, a food-bank operator in oil-rich Norway, says it is distributing 30% more food compared with the same period in 2021, a year that in itself saw sharply higher demand because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Food-bank usage is on the rise in the U.S., too, while grocery stores report customers there are trading down, buying more store-brand food and avoiding more expensive meat and fish.</p> <p>In Britain, the pain has been especially stark. The U.K.’s overall inflation rate hit 9.1% in May, compared with the same month a year ago, the fastest rise in prices for a member of the Group of Seven, the club of rich economies. Food prices rose 8.5% in May.</p> <p>“We’re seeing real food poverty for the first time in a generation,” John Allan, chairman of Tesco PLC, Britain’s biggest grocery chain, recently told the British Broadcasting Corp.</p> <p>A steep fall in the value of the British pound following the country’s vote to exit from the European Union had already made some imported food more expensive in the past few years. Making the more recent price increases especially hard to bear is the fact that Britain has enjoyed a long period of relatively low food prices. A handful of national supermarket chains compete against each other fiercely.</p> <p>Last month, the average price of cheddar cheese, a U.K. staple, was up by 59% from last June, according to the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, a trade body. Milk was up 27% in April over last year, according to government data.</p> <p>Those sorts of prices are now unaffordable for many. Some 44% of adults polled by the U.K.’s Office of National Statistics in May said they were buying less food because of the higher prices. Food banks are seeing a third more traffic since the start of the pandemic, according to the Trussell Trust, a food-bank provider.</p>

The Food Foundation, a food and nutrition lobby group, found food poverty, or food insecurity, had affected 15.5% of Britons in the six months to April, up from 7.6% pre-Covid. It describes food poverty as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.

In a survey published in May, it found a 57% jump in the proportion of U.K. households cutting back on food or missing meals altogether. The survey found 7.3 million adults in April were living in households that said they had gone without food or couldn't physically get it in the past month. That compared with 4.7 million adults in January.

"We know the cost of food has real consequences for people across the country," a U.K. government spokesman said. The government has provided cash payments and tax cuts for the very poorest to ease rises in the cost of living, he said, while introducing longer term measures that will ease food supply chain bottlenecks.

Deshia Shkalla, an unemployed single mother living in a one-bedroom apartment, feeds her infant regular milk rather than formula, eats less meat and plans her food budget down to the penny. She first noticed prices taking off after late February, when Russia invaded [Ukraine, one of the world's largest grain exporters](#). Her local food bank now often runs out of products.

"We all heard about the war, but we didn't expect food prices to climb like this," she said. "It changed everything."

The war is now rattling through kitchens around the world. The cost of grains soared following Moscow's invasion, and while they are now well below these highs, their prices are still bolstered by [Ukraine's inability to properly export](#) its harvests.

Ukraine produces over half the world's sunflower oil. In Britain, major grocery stores are putting limits on how many bottles customers can buy at one time.

High energy prices, exacerbated by the war, have added to the cost of transporting and manufacturing food. The pandemic, meanwhile, disrupted the industry's supply chains.

The [price rises have roiled poorer countries](#), helping trigger unrest that toppled Sri Lanka's prime minister and protests in the Middle East. The United Nations World Food Program has warned that some 2.46 billion people, or around 30% of the world, face moderate or severe food insecurity, which it defines as lacking regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth, development and a healthy life.

In poorer countries, food is a larger part of household spending. It is 59% in Nigeria, and 28% in Mexico, according to Trading Economics, an economics and financial indicators tracking site. In the U.K., it is 9.4%.

But in rich countries, the smaller a person's income, the more one spends on food, too. In the U.S., for instance, households in the lowest income quintile spent 27% of their income on food, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Those in the highest income quintile spent 7%.

At Ms. Shkalla's food bank, housed in a church recreation hall in Bounds Green, a neighborhood in north London, the line snaked out the door and into the street on a recent weekday. Anita Trisanska, waiting in the line, said she buys less fish and meat to make her family income stretch.

"If it wasn't for the food bank, I don't know what I'd do," said Ms. Trisanska, who stays at home with her small child. Her husband works seven days a week in hospitality to make ends meet, she said.

The number of people using the food bank has increased by 80 households, according to the bank. It currently supports several hundred people. Demand is so great that some stand in line from 9 a.m. to get the best products when the bank opens at noon.

	<p>The higher prices in the U.K. are crimping buying. Food store sales volumes fell by 1.6% in May and are 2.4% below their pre-coronavirus February 2020 levels, according to the Office of National Statistics.</p> <p>At the Co-operative Group Ltd., a big food retailer under several brands, customers are switching to cheaper store-brand foods, said Matt Hood, a managing director of its food business. They are also shifting from beef to chicken, which is less expensive. "At this stage, people are being wise with their money and making it stretch further," he said.</p> <p>Biniam Abraham, the assistant manager at a South London news agent, a small, independent grocery store akin to a New York City bodega, said prices are going up on average every two weeks. He said he has witnessed some customers asking checkout counter staff to stop scanning when they hit their budget.</p> <p>Sometimes customers argue with staff, he said, because they are confused by the rapid rises.</p> <p>"They do their best to squeeze," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Ukraine president: no land for peace deal
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/07/politics/volodymyr-zelensky-interview-cnntv/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Thursday that Ukraine is unwilling to cede any of its land to Russia, standing firm that a concession of Ukrainian territory won't be part of any diplomatic negotiations to end the war.</p> <p>"Ukrainians are not ready to give away their land, to accept that these territories belong to Russia. This is our land," Zelensky said in an exclusive interview aired Thursday on CNN's "The Situation Room."</p> <p>"We always talk about that, and we are intending to prove it," he added.</p> <p>Zelensky spoke to CNN at the same time as one of his top Western allies, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced he would be resigning. Speaking in Ukrainian via a translator, Zelensky said he was confident that Britain's policy toward Ukraine "will not be changing" even if the country's leadership is in tumult.</p> <p>"He resigned not because he was in Ukraine. I think on the contrary, what Johnson has been doing for Ukraine was helping us a great deal. I consider him a friend of Ukraine, but I think his society also supported Ukraine in Europe. That's why I think the UK, it's on the side of good, on the side of Ukraine," Zelensky said.</p> <p>"And I'm sure the UK policy toward Ukraine is not ... changing because of Boris Johnson's resignation. Our relations obviously gained a lot from Boris Johnson's understanding of things. We went through a lot of dramatic moments quite quickly. The help we needed was delivered rather quickly ... if (his resignation) will affect this speed of help I don't know. I will pray to God it won't be affecting that help."</p> <p>Russia's war with Ukraine has now lasted for more than four months, with no sign of either side backing down soon. Ukraine's early successes forced Russia to scale back its initial aims of toppling Kyiv, and Moscow's forces have now focused on taking territory in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces have now occupied most of the Luhansk region, outside of a few pockets of resistance, and are pressing toward cities in Donetsk.</p> <p>CNN reported last week that White House officials are losing confidence Ukraine will ever be able to take back all of the land it has lost to Russia since the war began, even with the aid of heavier and more sophisticated weaponry that the US and its allies plan to provide Kyiv.</p> <p>Zelensky acknowledged that Russia controls "almost all the Luhansk region," saying that his forces are now "fighting on the outskirts of this region." He said that Kyiv retreated to avoid mass losses of troops.</p>

"I don't even understand what exactly they're controlling there. They ruined towns, school. They are the occupiers of the rubble?" Zelensky said.

Zelensky said that he was happy that Sweden and Finland were being accepted as NATO members, even though the Western military alliance has long resisted accepting Ukraine as a member.

"It's not superficial, but deep understanding of the risks for these countries because of the aggressive attitude of Russia to sovereign countries," Zelensky said. "That's why we fully support their membership. The whole world is helping Ukraine, some doing humanitarian aid, some financial or military aid, both houses in the United States support us.

"The world is doing a lot, but it could have been easier -- Ukraine could have been accepted as a NATO member. It would be much more straightforward than people imagine."

Still, Zelensky expressed gratitude for the military support that Ukraine has received from the United States, which has provided weapons with greater capability as the war has dragged on, while urging the West to continue providing military support to help Ukraine keep up its fight.

"(The) United States are helping Ukraine, helping a lot, but it's not enough in order to win. I hope my trust will speed up this help to Ukraine," Zelensky said. "We want the increment of this help -- we're fighting for our land, we don't want people from different countries fight for our territory. But the US are a world economy and can help us with both arms and finances.

"And also, the US can influence the decisions of the European countries -- this is also the political support. I have to be honest, some countries in Europe want a balance between Russia and Ukraine. But owing to the US help they started supporting us. So, when I talk about the volume and speed of the arms support, I'm not appealing only (to) the United States, I appeal to all the world leaders and saying that the faster help, the increment of help, will save the lives of Ukrainians and help us to regain territories occupied by Russia."

Asked whether the war could be over before the end of the year, Zelensky said, "Our country will stay united and unified. If the powerful weaponry from our partners will be coming to us on-time, and if good luck and God will be on our side, we can achieve a lot of things before the end of the year and we can stop this war. We can stop the military part, at least, of this war."

Zelensky also reiterated his call for US President Joe Biden to visit Kyiv, saying it would send a message to Russia and the world.

"We would love to see President Biden in Ukraine. I heard that he supported the idea. There are some security moments, which stand in the way of his visit, we understand that," Zelensky said. "I truly think this would help the Ukrainians. Ukrainians support (the) United States, the trust of the Ukrainians to the United States is very high, same as to the UK and Poland and the Baltic states.

"So, visits of the world leaders who are not just partners but real friends -- they give a signal, a sign, that the United States support Ukraine because they believe in Ukrainian victory and are not afraid of Russia. They come despite the rockets flying in. They are not afraid of Putin because the world is much bigger than one leader of one country."

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HEADLINE	07/07 Mortgage rates fall; recession fears
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/mortgage-rates-fall-to-5-30-reflecting-recession-fears-11657202418?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	Mortgage rates recorded their largest decline since 2008 as investors raise their bets that the economy is headed for a downturn.

The average rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage fell to 5.30%, mortgage-finance giant Freddie Mac said Thursday. That is down from 5.70% last week. Mortgage rates haven't recorded such a big weekly decline since December 2008, when the rate fell from 5.97% to 5.53%.

Growing fears of a recession in the U.S. stand to further push down mortgage rates as investors pile into U.S. Treasuries, widely seen as safe investments during times of economic uncertainty. Mortgage rates are closely tied to yields on the benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasury, which fell to their lowest level in more than a month this week. Yields fall when prices rise.

Slightly lower borrowing costs could provide some relief for would-be home buyers who have had to contend this spring with double-digit growth in home prices and the fastest acceleration in mortgage rates in decades. Some mortgage lenders are already quoting rates above 6%, pushing some buyers out of the market

"Because of falling mortgage rates, homes may be more affordable than they were three weeks ago," Holden Lewis, home and mortgage spokesperson at NerdWallet said in a statement. "There were few, if any, times you could have said that in the first half of 2022."

Monthly mortgage payments remain at the least affordable level in years. The typical U.S. household will spend an additional \$400 on its mortgage payment each month than it would have in January, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. A typical family is a household with an income near the U.S. median that purchases a home near the median purchase price. In April, the typical American household would have needed 41.2% of its income to cover monthly mortgage payments, according to the Atlanta Fed.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Big cities can't get workers back to office
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/office-remote-work-new-york-11657130765?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>Soon after a gunman shot and killed a Goldman Sachs Inc. employee on a New York City subway train in late May, David Solomon's email inbox started filling up.</p> <p>Staffers shared their grief and alarm with the Goldman chief executive. They also had questions about the viability of returning to the bank's Manhattan office, according to people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>Later that day, Mr. Solomon called New York City Mayor Eric Adams to express his concerns and make an emphatic point to the mayor, who has been struggling to increase the share of workers returning to the office. Mr. Solomon told him that employees were reluctant to return because the safety and quality of life in the city were deteriorating, these people said.</p> <p>More than two years into the Covid-19 pandemic, exasperation is growing among business, city and community leaders across the U.S. who have seen offices left behind while life returns to normal at restaurants, airlines, sporting events and other places where people gather. Even after many employers have adopted hybrid schedules, less than half the number of prepandemic office workers are returning to business districts consistently.</p> <p>The problem is most pronounced in America's biggest cities. Nationally, office use hit a pandemic-era high of 44% in early June, while cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco and New York have lagged behind, according to Kastle Systems, which collects data on how many workers swipe into office buildings each day.</p> <p>The divide has created a sense of urgency among politicians and business leaders in these cities, where the stakes are especially high because office workers are the engine of local economies and fuel small businesses.</p> <p>From April 2020 to March 2021, 26,300 New York City small businesses closed permanently, according to a report the mayor released in the spring. Available office space in New York has grown to about 125</p>

million square feet, up from 90 million in the first quarter of 2020, according to data firm CoStar Group Inc. Retail rents in Manhattan have declined for 18 consecutive quarters, starting well before the pandemic, according to commercial real estate services firm [CBRE Group Inc.](#)

One issue for workers in big cities is time spent in transit. New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco and Chicago have some of the nation's longest commute times—as well as some of the lowest return-to-office rates, according to a [Wall Street Journal analysis](#) of the country's 24 largest metropolitan areas in May.

Concerns about crime and safety, including on public transportation, have contributed to urban employees' unease. In New York City, major crimes, which include murder, robbery and assault, rose about 7.5% from 2019 to 2021, according to New York Police Department statistics. In San Francisco, there were 56 homicides in 2021 compared with 41 in 2019, while robberies and assaults both fell. And in Los Angeles, violent crime edged up about 4% between 2019 and 2021.

Those issues come on top of a reluctance to return to the office that extends beyond big cities. Companies are hearing from workers that “I’m still worried about Covid. Gas prices are \$5 a gallon and it’s too expensive to go into work,” said Brian Kropp, vice president of human resources research at advisory firm Gartner. “Or, why should I go into work when half the people I need are going to be at home on any given day?”

Nearly two out of every three workers whose jobs can be done remotely prefer a mix of remote and in-person work, according to a global survey completed in March by accounting and consulting firm PwC. And 68% of workers in North America said they would consider looking for another job if their managers insist they return to their workplace full-time, according to a November 2021 survey by payroll provider ADP.

One of the latest companies to retreat from the workplace is Yelp Inc. The San Francisco-based review platform said last month it is closing offices in New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C. The three offices combined had less than 2% weekly average utilization.

Although financial company Nearwater Capital in New York now requires workers to return to the office five days a week, “people aren’t really asking for a work-from-home day as much as apprising us that they intend to work from home,” said James Peterson, the firm’s managing partner.

The line between vacation and work from home “has definitely blurred,” he said. “We’ve had a bit of, ‘We are going to Florida to see the in-laws for a week, so I’ll be working [remotely].’”

Many employers remain reluctant to take a hard line, fearing the loss of employees when attrition has been at or near record rates for months. With the rise in remote work, companies are now competing with employers around the world, not just those in their local markets.

Many of New York’s largest employers have adopted hybrid work strategies. American Express Co. in March launched a program that allows employees to choose remote work or a combination of office and working from home. Some workers are in the office every workday, but about 40% of the U.S. workforce has opted to be remote all of the time, according to the company.

Paramount Global earlier this year also adopted a hybrid strategy which has workers in the office about half of their time, according to a spokeswoman.

At JP Morgan Chase & Co., some jobs require workers to be in the office five days a week. Other employees have adopted a hybrid schedule while a small percentage are doing all of their work from home, according to the company.

Office usage in New York has been inching up, hitting 41.2% the week of June 29, down from its pandemic high of 42.5% the previous week. The rate is still far lower than politicians and business leaders would like to see.

Many executives say they felt they were making progress in their back-to-the-office efforts earlier this year, following a string of setbacks from Covid surges. In New York, the recent subway shooting and other violent incidents on the subway have undercut momentum.

A few days after he placed a call to Mayor Adams, Mr. Solomon repeated his concerns on a 30-minute call organized by the Partnership for New York City, a coalition of business leaders that has been working closely with the mayor to speed the return-to-office. More than 100 executives at top firms participated in the call, according to participants.

Many New York executives are pushing for tougher measures on crime. Other groups have worked to keep employees at home and preserve as much flexibility as possible. Some companies have had to negotiate with labor unions when reopening offices. Unions say they want to protect worker safety and adhere to other contract provisions.

At first, Celestie Rodrigues enjoyed going to her office a couple of times a week starting in the summer of 2021, when the advertising agency where she works started a voluntary return-to-work policy. The 26-year-old client manager liked the change of pace and the break from her small Manhattan apartment.

On the commute to work this winter, a man flashed her when they were the only two people in the subway car. "I cried in the office because I was so shocked and stunned by what happened," she said.

She stopped taking the subway for a month, and still walks or bikes to get around when she can. She occasionally goes into the office, but sometimes opts to work at a cafe instead when she feels shut in.

To deal with worker concerns about subway safety and the high price of gas, some companies are offering to pay for car services or provide new transportation allowances. Last year, professional services firm Deloitte said that as it changes to a hybrid workplace it would provide workers up to \$1,000 in reimbursement for parking, tolls and other commuting costs.

More than 25% of the employers surveyed by Gartner at the end of March said they were providing free lunch or snacks to workers to lure them back to offices. Five percent said they were subsidizing or reimbursing commuting costs.

Thousands of small businesses, meanwhile, are struggling to survive with so many workers home. At Blue Park Kitchen, a lunch-focused restaurant in Manhattan's Financial District, revenue is down about 30% from prepandemic levels. It has been growing recently, mostly thanks to catering orders from companies offering free lunch to their staff, said owner and chef Kelly Fitzpatrick.

"New York is particularly tough because our fixed costs are so astronomical that until we get back to 85% to 90% of where we were pre-Covid, it's impossible to make any money," she said.

In another effort to lure workers back, many businesses are upgrading their office space to give workers more light, filtered air and collaboration-focused workspaces.

In late 2020, Carlyle Group moved its New York City office to the new One Vanderbilt tower, next to Manhattan's Grand Central Terminal. The space has been a factor in drawing employees back, said Bruce Larson, the private-equity firm's chief human resources officer. He expects people back three days a week, with some flexibility. On any day other than Friday, 60% of Carlyle's roughly 480 New York-based workers are in the office.

"It's easy to take for granted how much the quality of the space matters on people wanting to be in the office, and this is a good reminder," said Mr. Larson, who attended the meeting with the mayor.

Some companies say they will take a tougher stand on office return after the summer. Workplace attendance is voluntary for now at Cadre, a real-estate startup, said founder and executive chairman Ryan Williams, but the company expects employees to be in the office three days a week after Labor Day.

With around 80 people based in New York, Cadre plans to move into a new office space that it designed with a postpandemic future in mind. Gone are the preponderance of cubicles and private offices of Cadre's prior spaces. The new location will feature more conference rooms where teams can work together.

Cadre also mapped out its employees' residences to choose a neighborhood that would minimize commute distances. The office is close to Grand Central; the old one was downtown. "The commute for a lot of people pre-Covid could take up to three to four hours round trip," Mr. Williams said.

Silverstein Properties, which owns eight office buildings in New York City, is seeing average office occupancy between 40% and 45% Tuesdays through Thursdays, said chief executive Marty Burger.

Recently, he said, some buildings have had attendance close to 70%. The firm created an app for tenants that lists daily events, promotions and programming available in its buildings. Those can include massages, meditation classes, concerts and discounts from local restaurants and retailers.

"We did more office leasing in the first quarter of 2022 than we did in all of 2021," Mr. Burger said.

The best hope for companies for now might be that more workers feel like Michael Bartolomeo. The freelance video editor commutes each weekday from his Brooklyn apartment, which he shares with his newborn daughter, 4-year-old son and working-from-home wife, to the Manhattan production company where he is finishing up a project.

He said the office environment provides a respite from the isolation that comes with spending his days staring at a screen with headphones on. He worries what he'll do when this job ends.

"Maybe this has just made me realize I don't really want to continue working in an industry where the vast majority of people are remote," he said.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Kirkland firefighters: department in crisis
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3552438/understaffed-overworked-kirkland-firefighters-say-department-is-crisis/
GIST	<p>An outraged group of firefighters told Kirkland City Council members the department is in the midst of a severe staffing crisis. They say some of their colleagues are working 20 days in a row.</p> <p>Capt. Justin Becker says the last two weeks he's worked 260 hours straight. Typically, in that same time, he'd have logged only 80.</p> <p>"I feel like we're in a staffing crisis of the likes I've never seen in my almost 20 years here at the fire department," said Becker. "When we firefighters ... are that sleep-deprived, there's a tremendous risk to this city of having someone ... drive a 60-pound apparatus down the street."</p> <p>Kirkland Fire Chief Joe Sanford agrees that's too many hours to work, but he disagrees as to the severity of the problem.</p> <p>"I wouldn't call what we have a staffing crisis," said Sanford.</p> <p>Response times are another point of disagreement between Sanford and Kirkland Firefighters Local 2545. The vice president of the union, Evan Hurley, says the shortage means it could take longer for help to get to you. Sanford pushed back, saying that there's been no documented impact to response times.</p>

	<p>“Morale is at an all-time low,” said Hurley. “We’ve had some lows before, but this is as bad as it’s ever been.”</p> <p>According to Local 2545, on the Fourth of July — perhaps the busiest day of the year for firefighters — 40% of staff were working overtime.</p> <p>“We were unable to fill a fourth engine and extra staffing for the Fourth of July, which is the first time in my entire career I’ve heard them not even try,” said Hurley.</p> <p>Pushing back, the chief says the reduction in staff was due to downtown Kirkland not having a firework show this past holiday.</p> <p>The firefighter’s union wants the chief and members of Kirkland City Council to reconsider their vaccine mandate, which resulted in 12 terminations and retirements.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 US life expectancy falls behind China
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7vevb/us-life-expectancy-falls-behind-china
GIST	<p>Chinese people now live longer than their U.S. counterparts, latest data showed.</p> <p>The average life expectancy of Chinese people has risen from 76.5 years in 2016 to 77.93 at present, Mao Qun’an, a senior official from the National Health Commission, announced on Tuesday. This puts it above that of the U.S., which stood at 76.6 years in 2021.</p> <p>Calculations in 2018 suggested that life expectancy in China was on course to overtake that of the U.S. around 2027, but the process has been sped up by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The U.S. experienced a historic decline in life expectancy due to COVID-19, which became the third leading cause of death in the country in 2020 and 2021, as a new study by the National Cancer Institute found.</p> <p>More than a million have died from COVID in the U.S. by May this year, driving a major drop in life expectancy for the second year in a row.</p> <p>Published in April, a study based on government provisional data found a net loss of 2.26 years in U.S. life expectancy since 2019. It is now at the lowest in more than two decades, a trend Steven Woolf, a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University who conducted the study, described as “disturbing.”</p> <p>China, in the meantime, aims to raise average life expectancy to 79 years by 2030. It has clamped down on childhood obesity, spent up to a billion dollars to build free fitness facilities, and even limited the time minors can spend on video games, all in an effort to promote the health of its citizens.</p> <p>In addition, the Chinese government follows a stringent zero-COVID policy that seeks to stamp out any infection with lockdowns and mass testing. It has helped the country keep its COVID death toll remarkably low, even if its official 5,200 COVID fatalities likely represent just a fraction of the true toll of the virus in the country.</p> <p>But such a comparison does not necessarily reflect the full picture.</p> <p>“Life expectancy is an estimate of mortality rates in a population for a given year,” Woolf told VICE World News. “Neither estimate tells us anything about what life expectancy will be in the next year in either country and thus which country is excelling.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Security group link to Minnesota police
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SOURCE	https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/07/07/1055508/secret-police-private-security-group-minnesota-misinformation-protestors/
GIST	<p>When US marshals shot and killed a 32-year-old Black man named Winston Boogie Smith Jr. in a parking garage in Minneapolis's Uptown neighborhood on June 3, 2021, the city was already in a full-blown policing crisis.</p> <p>Around 300 officers had quit over the previous two years amid near-constant protests and public criticism in the wake of George Floyd's murder by a member of the police force in May 2020. Intense debates over the Minneapolis Police Department's budget raged, and some Minneapolis council members were elected after campaigning on a platform of defunding the police. Adding yet more strain to the shorthanded department, homicides had increased almost 30% across the US in 2020. Vital services were starting to fail—in the first half of 2021, response times to 911 calls in Minneapolis increased by 36%.</p> <p>Minneapolis had been at the vanguard of activism on policing and racial justice since Floyd's death. After Smith's killing, protests reignited all over the city—not only at public spaces, like the intersection where Floyd was murdered, but also in private ones, like the parking garage where Smith was shot. As demonstrations spread from the streets into shopping districts and parking lots, the cops couldn't keep up.</p> <p>Into the void stepped private security groups. The number of new companies applying for licenses from the Minnesota Board of Private Detective and Protective Agent Services ballooned from 14 in 2019 to 27 in 2021. Beginning in 2020, many Minneapolis property owners hired these private security organizations, ostensibly to prevent property damage. But the organizations often ended up managing protest activity—a task usually reserved for police, and one for which most private security guards are not trained.</p> <p>According to documents obtained by MIT Technology Review through public records requests, there are 13 private security guards for every one police officer in downtown Minneapolis. There are currently 172 security groups and individual detectives with active licenses in Minnesota, from private investigators to companies with sophisticated surveillance operations and thousands of employees. They offer a range of services focused on the protection of property and privately owned assets. Some are heavily armed, some rely on open-source intelligence, and many have relationships with police departments.</p> <p>And while the Minneapolis Police Department maintains public-facing policies for First Amendment activities like demonstrations and protests, there is no such requirement for private security groups. Similarly, police are accountable for their actions to the city government, and voters, whereas private groups are not.</p> <p>In our look at over 400 documents, we found that during the protests after Smith was shot, several private organizations were providing security services at and around the parking garage where the killing took place, including We Push for Peace and W&W Protection. One company, Conflict Resolution Group, came up repeatedly.</p> <p>The documents reveal that Conflict Resolution Group (CRG) regularly provided Minneapolis police with information about activists that was at times untrue and politicized. CRG also intimidated activists and revealed the identity of protesters; anonymous protest has been consistently upheld by the Supreme Court as a constitutionally protected activity. The Minneapolis Police Department referred the group to other businesses, despite concerns within the department about its behavior.</p> <p>The city of Minneapolis, like many cities, maintains ties with many private security groups. A public-private partnership through the city's Downtown Improvement District connects private security groups with police departments and businesses, and provides information-sharing infrastructure like radio equipment and regular meetings.</p> <p>But CRG stands out for the prominent and controversial role it has played in the city's reckoning with racism and police violence. From July through at least December 2021, the organization maintained a presence at the garage where Smith was killed, which had become a frequent protest site. The group's tactics caused some protesters to fear for their personal safety. On its website, the group publicly touts its</p>

military-style operation, stating that it “specializes in all facets of high threat protection operations, surveillance, social media tracking and drone operations that were learned and honed on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan and in high threat permissive environments in Libya and Somalia.”

The group hasn’t disclosed how its employees train for the difficult task of protecting private property while simultaneously ensuring the rights of fellow Americans—including the right to anonymity in public protest, [a key tenet of the US Constitution’s free-speech protections](#). Minnesota state statutes do not require private security groups to undergo any training related to the First Amendment, though there are training mandates for firearms and deescalation tactics, among other things. The company’s CEO, Nathan Seabrook, told MIT Technology Review that many of our findings are false. However, CRG did not respond to multiple requests for clarification or comment.

How CRG intimidated a protestor

Seven Points is a collection of several popular shops and restaurants adjacent to the parking garage where Smith was killed. A management company for the Seven Points property—which a spokesperson declined to name—hired CRG, which was at the garage in July, to assist with security related to protests that broke out there.

Emma Ruddock, an artist and a musician, lived half a block away from the parking structure and had been outside her apartment when Smith was killed. She says she heard the fatal gunshots and watched police usher Norhan Askar, the woman Smith was with when he was shot, into a police car.

In the weeks after the shooting, activists occupied a small lot of grass next to the garage and erected a “peace garden” that memorialized Smith and Deona Marie Knajdek, an activist who was killed [when a man plowed into a barricade during a protest shortly after Smith’s death](#). Ruddock became a frequent presence at the garden, photographing and recording the activism in her neighborhood and adding her voice to criticisms aimed squarely at law enforcement and, later, at CRG and Seabrook.

Over the course of the summer, the relationship between activists and CRG had grown increasingly tense as the group staffed the area with security guards, many of them outfitted in military gear and armed with rifles. A spokesperson for Seven Points says the company had intended to keep the peace garden open, but said in a statement to MIT Technology Review that the garden “became a nuisance, an encampment, and a gathering place for drug activity and violence.” The company noted on its Instagram page that “continued destruction of property, violent acts, arson, noise ordinance violations, and blocking access to Uptown residents and businesses created an unsustainable and unhealthy situation.” The company provided no evidence of drugs or violence on the property, despite multiple requests. In its statement, a spokesperson for Seven Points also said it served “dozens of individuals with trespass notices,” though it provided no documentation. At least one individual was arrested for trespassing on the property in July.

In the fall, Ruddock had a run-in with CRG that left her shaken. During a protest on the night of October 3, she and about 100 others gathered near the parking garage to commemorate the four-month anniversary of Smith’s passing. A metal fence, concrete barriers, floodlights, and spotlights were erected around the peace garden, relegating protesters to the public sidewalk.

As protesters chanted, acoustic guitar music began playing over CRG’s loudspeakers. Ruddock was shocked to hear her own voice begin serenading the crowd with a love song—“so please please choose your words carefully ’cause I will keep them in my sweater.” The crowd was unaware, at the time, that the music was written and performed by her. She says the song was played several times.

“I felt like I was in a nightmare. It was just so deeply incongruous,” she says. “Honestly, I felt quite humiliated by it, because there were all these people who were trying to speak and they were being drowned out.” Ruddock says, “It was so grotesque and obviously designed to make me know that they were watching me.” CRG had identified her, found a video of her music, and “blasted my music through my neighborhood.”

"I felt like I was going to have a panic attack," she says. Ruddock tried to explain the situation to other activists—many of whom didn't know that she was a musician, much less that it was her song—and quickly left the protest. She doesn't know why she was singled out but suspects it was because she was frequently in attendance at the area around Seven Points with camera in hand, photographing the unrest in her neighborhood.

CRG also played recordings of speeches made by Martin Luther King Jr. to drown out chants at protests, according to three activists we spoke with. According to Rick Hodsdon, the chair of the Minnesota Board of Private Detectives and Protective Agent Services, no formal complaints against CRG have been filed. A complaint would trigger an investigation by the agency and could lead to revocation of security licenses and, potentially, criminal charges.

A look at the "intel reports"

What Ruddock couldn't have known is that CRG also operated like a covert intelligence team for the Minneapolis Police Department. According to emails obtained by MIT Technology Review, CRG surveilled activists in Uptown and often sent reports to the department. One such 17-page report, entitled "Initial Threat Assessment," described the organizers as part of "antifa," a term often used in far-right discourse to [exaggerate the threat](#) posed by radical left-wing political groups. Ruddock was identified as one of the leaders of antifa, a claim she calls "ridiculous" and says she has "never been affiliated with antifa or any extremist groups."

(MIT Technology Review is not publishing the reports we reviewed because of the risk of spreading false and potentially defamatory information.)

Some of the reports include information sourced from the internet and social media, as well as photographs of Ruddock and other activists. In one exchange between Seven Points and MPD, Seven Points referred to CRG's "cameras they do surveillance with." Some information is drawn from the website AntifaWatch, including mugshots of Ruddock and other activists from a mass arrest during a protest on June 5, 2021, two days after Smith's death. The 2021 charges against Ruddock have since been dropped for "insufficient evidence," and there is pending litigation against the city surrounding the arrest.

AntifaWatch says it "exists to document and track Antifa and the Far Left." The site publishes photographs of almost 7,000 people allegedly engaged in antifa or antifa-associated activities, along with other information about them. Its information is sourced from news reports, social media posts, and submissions that anyone can make. The website states that "for a Report to be approved it must have a reasonable level of proof (News article, arrest picture, riot picture, self-identifying, etc)." MIT Technology Review attempted to verify several of the entries on the site and found inaccuracies. For example, the daughter of New York City's former mayor Bill de Blasio is included on the list for an arrest at a Black Lives Matter protest on May 31, 2020, in New York City. AntifaWatch characterized Chiara de Blasio as "rioting with antifa," though the police report [does not indicate that de Blasio participated in rioting](#).

The website states that "a report on AntifaWatch is in no way, shape or form an accusation of one's involvement in Antifa, terrorism, or terroristic groups" and says that it "is not a doxxing website," though it explicitly attempts to identify and reveal personal information about people. Its posts often contain bigoted language. It also features a facial recognition feature: anyone can upload an image, and the website will return potential matches from its AntifaWatch database.

According to a domain registration search of antifawatch.net, the website is registered to Epik Holdings, [a web hosting service popular with far-right websites](#) (including Parler and Gab) that have been denied hosting by other internet service providers. AntifaWatch declined to comment for this story.

Ruddock says she had trouble getting a job after her information was uploaded to AntifaWatch, which now is the top result in a Google search for her name and Minneapolis. Her lawyer requested in an email that AntifaWatch remove her information but received no reply.

“Over the last several years, the ‘antifa’ label has become a political cudgel wielded by conservative politicians and activists who engage in threat-mongering about the far left,” says Michael Kenney, a professor of international affairs at the University of Pittsburgh who studies antifascism and political violence. “These conservative activists and politicians seek to rally like-minded supporters by demonizing far-left activists and exaggerating the threat they pose to American society.” Kenney says the idea that antifa operates as some kind of shadow group pulling strings behind the scenes at protests is far-fetched. Only a few thousand people belong to radical antifascist political groups in the US, he says, and many will openly disclose their political views.

MIT Technology Review has not found evidence that Ruddock is a part of a radical antifascist political group. Minneapolis Police have not replied to our requests about antifascist activity in Uptown. In one email from September 2021 found in public documents, police do mention “local antifa/anarchists” in Minneapolis, though an [investigation by the FBI in December 2020](#) found no evidence of “antifa-led riots” during the protests and unrest after George Floyd’s murder. Michael Paul, special agent in charge of the FBI’s Minneapolis Field Office, said at the time, “We haven’t seen any trend of antifa folks who were involved here in the criminal activity or violence.”

Along with its accusations that Ruddock and others are members of antifa, the CRG report entitled “Initial Threat Assessment” contains a grab bag of questionable information about the threat of antifa extremist groups in the Minneapolis area. The report cites [right-wing content creator Andy Ngo](#) as a source and even questions the science of climate change.

The report also includes screenshots from Ruddock’s private Instagram account. That report and others show that CRG surveilled several other activists in addition to her, though she is mentioned more than anyone else.

Partnering with police

It doesn’t appear that CRG and the Minneapolis Police Department have a contract, but the two have a complex working relationship.

Emails we reviewed from public records requests show that CRG sent at least eight reports to the Minneapolis Police Department from March to December 2021 about activities related to the area around Seven Points, as well as other properties its guards were patrolling. The group also sent over different versions of its reports to MPD, including a shorter “flash” report, which appears to include more real-time information about activity around Uptown, including surveillance footage of the garage. The reports often contained unreliable or unsubstantiated information.

For example, the group sent MPD an “individual of interest” report that includes information sourced from Twitter about someone with a tattoo commemorating the burning of the MPD Third Precinct during the 2020 protests. CRG insinuated that the tattoo shows this person might have been involved in the crime and reported that the person has “possible gender dysphoria.” “Our findings are based off of our analytical experience working in conflict zones, tracking various terror groups and providing analytical insight and perspective during the global war on terror,” the report says, before adding: “Our team reached out to contacts in our intelligence network and asked two other government affiliated analyst [sic] to look at the picture and the tattoo and give an analytical perspective.” According to Minnesota court records, this person has never been tried for any crimes.

Officers in the Minneapolis Police Department appeared to have reservations about CRG and its CEO, Seabrook. On September 14, 2021, one officer sent an internal email saying the department had “to talk more about Nathan Seabrook and his company, Conflict Resolution Group,” which the officer said “looked like a group of heavily armed vigilantes.” Another officer called him “diabolically manipulative” and said, “He’s the guy who wants to lay rotting animal parts in the alley on 9th St.,” apparently in order to deter people from lingering in a supposedly drug-ridden space.

Despite such hesitation, the emails reveal that the MPD facilitated connections between CRG and groups dealing with persistent security issues such as drug use and violence on private property. In an exchange

on August 17 between a Minneapolis Police Department officer and the head of operations at North Central University, which is located in the city, the North Central University employee says that the university's president required a referral from MPD to use CRG, and an inspector on the force provided one. In another exchange, an MPD officer connected two local businesses that had contracted with CRG to the Downtown Improvement District.

MPD told MIT Technology Review in an emailed statement that the department "interacts daily with private security personnel throughout the city," adding: "MPD does meet with security personnel to discuss expectations, civil vs criminal issues, private vs public issues, and emphasize the importance of employing de-escalation." The statement goes on to say that "examples of MPD's continued interaction with private security companies and personnel include the US Bank Stadium, Target Center, and all area hospitals." MPD did not reply to our questions about the department's specific relationship with CRG or the level of criminal activity in Uptown.

"I was very scared"

Beyond the area around Seven Points, private security guards are managing protest activity all over Minneapolis. These groups are far less regulated than police departments. In the case of CRG, which seems to rely heavily on monitoring social media and questionable websites, it's had a chilling effect on people's willingness to exercise their right to freedom of speech.

We spoke with a number of activists involved in the Uptown protests who found CRG's methods excessive. "They want to scare you by shouting facts anyone can find in your social media bio, and they'll go a step further by waiting until you're alone before making comments that show they're actively monitoring social media posts," explained Aisha Kaylor, who was identified by CRG as a protest leader in one report sent to Minneapolis police. Kaylor says she took part in what she called vigils and community gatherings largely by bringing water and snacks. She is concerned about the "open, back-and-forth communication of information gathered by CRG's ability to do essentially whatever they want, including actively and closely monitoring social media."

And while she admits that she "laughed out loud" when she saw the photo and the description of herself as a "leader" from CRG's report, Kaylor is still worried by the whole affair: "It's irrational to not be worried about what their ability to gather intelligence and so easily share it with MPD means."

Ruddock, the musician, says she watched her neighborhood transform into something unrecognizable. She says CRG wasn't alone in contributing to the atmosphere of intimidation—other groups on the premises, including We Push for Peace and W&W Protection, treated activists similarly. By winter, protests in Uptown had dissipated and she was going to the area around Seven Points less frequently, in part out of fear for her personal safety.

CRG has not responded to questions about its tactics, relationship with police, and activity at the area around Seven Points property. We Push for Peace and W&W Protection also did not reply to our inquiries.

We first spoke with Ruddock in the fall of 2021, and she was still living in the neighborhood around Seven Points. She had stopped using her name with people she met unless absolutely necessary. She'd drive her car around the block before parking at night so as not to be seen or followed home, and she would bring her bike inside wherever she went to conceal her location from anyone outside. "I was very scared, and I've continued to feel very scared," she says. "I've developed habits to avoid feeling like—I don't know—that they can see me."

We reviewed our findings with Rick Hodsdon, the chair of the Minnesota Private Detective and Security Board. When asked about CRG's practice of monitoring activists and filing reports on them to police, he said he didn't believe there was anything "in the law that prohibits that behavior." He noted that private citizens and groups often send tips to police.

	<p>Hodsdon acknowledged that demand for private security is growing rapidly, mainly from property owners and other private citizens. “Police are not relying more on private-sector security,” he said. “The members of society are, and the members of society are relying more on private-sector security because of the shortages [and because] of not being able to rely on having a public-sector police officer available when you need them.”</p> <p>Indeed, there is a long history of private security groups acting in lieu of law enforcement, and engaging in questionable legal activity while doing so. In 2017, the oil company Energy Transfer Partners hired the private security group TigerSwan to suppress protests at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation against the Dakota Access Pipeline.</p> <p>TigerSwan compared activists to “jihadists” in shoddy intel reports and touted its experience in armed conflict zones, much as CRG does. Jamil Dakwar, the director of the ACLU Human Rights Program, said at the time, “The First Amendment’s guarantee of the ‘right of the people peaceably to assemble’ cannot be reconciled with private military contractors deploying against peaceful protesters on domestic soil with little or no oversight or accountability. Their collaboration with federal, state, and local governments requires a credible and independent investigation.”</p> <p>In other words, security groups “are not there to protect anybody’s First Amendment rights, right?” as Hodsdon put it. “They’re there to protect the safety of consumer staff and physical property of whoever hires them.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Bangladesh faces rise in Covid before Eid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/world/asia/bangladesh-eid-covid.html
GIST	<p>DHAKA, Bangladesh — Rebeka Beshra should be on a packed bus for the 150-mile journey to her parents’ home to celebrate Eid al-Adha, one of the biggest Muslim holidays.</p> <p>Instead, she is debating whether the trip home is worth it given the surge in coronavirus cases in Bangladesh.</p> <p>“It would be better not to go home this time as the virus is spreading again,” said Ms. Beshra, 25. Even though she and her husband are fully vaccinated, her biggest worry, she said, is taking the virus home to her parents, who are 55 and 65 years old.</p> <p>The seven-day average of new cases has risen to the highest since February, signaling a new wave of infections in the South Asian nation. Bangladesh’s health system nearly collapsed during a Covid-19 wave last August.</p> <p>The seven-day average rose to about 2,000 on Wednesday, more than double the number of cases two weeks ago, according to data from the health ministry. Before the current wave, which began in mid June, Bangladesh had not recorded a death from the virus since May and often went weeks without one.</p> <p>The number of cases is rising because people are not wearing masks and some people have hesitated to get third dose of a vaccine, said Mohammad Mushtuq Husain, an epidemiologist and adviser at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research in Dhaka.</p> <p>The Eid holidays, which begin on Saturday and last until July 13, could prove to be a superspreader event, experts say, as millions of people are expected to travel home and gather at mosques, markets and family celebrations.</p> <p>“People are traveling to villages through overcrowded public transport,” said Be-Nazir Ahmed, an epidemiologist and a former director of Disease Control at the Directorate General of Health Services. “If the new wave spreads to remote areas, the elderly population will face a dangerous situation.”</p>

	<p>If the current trend of infections continues, the situation could be disastrous, said Dr. Husain. “We have a great risk of suffering immensely.”</p> <p>While 73 percent of Bangladesh’s 170 million people have received two doses of a coronavirus vaccine, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford, about 18 percent have received a third dose.</p> <p>Ms. Beshra, who works at a coffee shop in Dhaka, one of the world’s most densely populated cities, said she was frustrated by how many people came to her store without masks on. They have even posted a note on the wall saying masks are mandatory.</p> <p>“People have no fear about being infected,” said Ms. Beshra. She said she will miss her parents terribly if she decides not to go home. “And I will miss the mutton that I love.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Army reservists, Guard: no vax, no pay
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/7/no-pay-guard-reserve-troops-who-refuse-covid-19-vaccine/
GIST	<p>Even as the Army struggles to fill its ranks during the most severe military recruiting downturn in years, thousands of troops in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine are being told this week they won’t receive pay or retirement credit for future federally funded drills.</p> <p>Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin made the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all service members in August 2021 and told the secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force to issue guidance and timelines. The mandate included both active-duty troops and part-time reservists.</p> <p>Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers who haven’t been granted an approved or pending exemption are subject to several adverse actions, including an official reprimand. Troops who continue to refuse the order could be kicked out, Army officials said.</p> <p>As of June 30, 89% of soldiers in the Army Reserve are fully vaccinated, while the rate is 88% for the Army National Guard, officials said.</p> <p>“Unit commanders will be able to activate and pay soldiers for limited administrative purposes, such as receiving the vaccine, processing their exemption requests, or conducting separation procedures,” Army officials said.</p> <p>Gen. James McConville, the Army Chief of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in May that the service was facing the most daunting recruiting challenge he has experienced in his career.</p> <p>“We are in a war for talent,” he told the senators. “We need to attract others [and] we need to expose others to the benefits of serving their country.”</p> <p>That “war for talent” hasn’t stopped the Army from forcing out more than 1,000 vaccine-refusing soldiers as of June 21, however.</p> <p>Commanders have issued more than 3,400 general officer written reprimands to active duty soldiers who won’t take the COVID-19 vaccine.</p> <p>Opinions vary on the service’s “get tough” policy for part-time Army soldiers who won’t get the vaccine. A soldier on Reddit, a social media platform, said he rolled up his sleeve because he “likes being employed by the U.S. government.”</p> <p>“If I didn’t need it to remain employed, I probably wouldn’t have bothered,” he said.</p>

Another Army commentator also said he got the COVID-19 vaccine but acknowledged the mandate was leaving some units inadequately staffed.

“We really are losing a ton of people. It’s brutal,” he wrote. “Tons and tons of experience is being shown the door.”

Some Republican lawmakers are accusing the Biden administration and Mr. Austin of trying to coerce and punish service members who won’t take the COVID-19 vaccine. The Supreme Court threw out a White House attempt to mandate that all major employers in the private sector be vaccinated.

“The Biden administration is destroying the readiness of our armed forces by creating an unnecessary recruiting and retention shortfall and trying to make up the difference by lowering other crucial education and fitness standards,” tweeted Rep. Mike Johnson, Louisiana Republican.

“All of this [is] over an illness that is very, very, very unlikely to have any significant effect on the young men and women of our military, and a vaccine that lacks long-term data on safety and efficacy for this cohort,” Mr. Johnson added.

The Army has been throwing piles of cash at their recruiting problem. The service is offering a \$35,000 bonus for future soldiers willing to ship out to basic training within 45 days of signing a four-year contract. Even soldiers willing to serve for as few as two years on active duty are eligible for a \$10,000 bonus. The “quick ship” bonus can be added on top of other incentives being offered for hard-to-fill jobs. Troops can receive up to \$50,000 in combined enlistment incentives, Army officials said.

Pentagon officials have insisted that the COVID-19 vaccine mandate is necessary in order to have a fighting force able to win on the battlefield.

“Army readiness depends on soldiers who are prepared to train, deploy, fight and win our nation’s wars. Unvaccinated soldiers present a risk to the force and jeopardizes readiness,” Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth said in a statement.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Impact of dollar nearly equal to euro
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/7/with-us-dollar-nearly-equal-to-euro-impact-is-bein/
GIST	<p>The U.S. dollar has been surging so much that it’s nearly equal in value to the euro for the first time in 20 years. That trend, though, threatens to hurt American companies because their goods become more expensive for foreign buyers. If U.S. exports were to weaken as a result, so, too, would the already-slowing U.S. economy.</p> <p>Yet there’s a positive side for Americans, too: A stronger buck provides modest relief from runaway inflation because the vast array of goods that are imported to the U.S. - from cars and computers to toys and medical equipment - become less expensive. A strengthened dollar also delivers bargains to American tourists sightseeing in Europe, from Amsterdam to Athens.</p> <p>The U.S. Dollar Index, which measures the value of American money against six major foreign currencies, has jumped nearly 12% this year to a two-decade high. The euro is now worth just under \$1.02.</p> <p>The dollar is climbing mainly because the Federal Reserve is raising interest rates more aggressively than central banks in other countries are in its effort to cool the hottest U.S. inflation in four decades. The Fed’s rate hikes cause yields on U.S. Treasuries to rise, which attracts investors seeking richer yields than they can get elsewhere in the world. This increased demand for dollar-denominated securities, in turn, boosts the dollar’s value.</p>

Also contributing to the currency's appeal, notes Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics, is that despite concern about a potential recession in the United States, "the U.S. economy is on firmer footing compared to Europe."

Not since July 15, 2002, has the euro been valued at less than one dollar. On that day, the euro blew past parity with the dollar as huge U.S. trade deficits and accounting scandals on Wall Street pulled down the U.S. currency.

This year, the euro has sagged largely because of growing fears that the 19 countries that use the currency will sink into recession. The war in Ukraine has magnified oil and gas prices and punished European consumers and businesses.

In particular, Russia's recent reduction in natural gas supplies has sent prices skyrocketing and raised fears of a total cutoff that could force governments to ration energy to industry to spare homes, schools and hospitals. (European leaders have denounced Moscow's move as an effort to blackmail Europe for backing Ukraine and embracing Western sanctions in the aftermath of Russia's invasion.)

Economists at Berenberg bank have calculated that at current rates of consumption the added gas bill would be 220 billion euros (\$224 billion) over 12 months, or a whopping 1.5% of annual economic output.

"This war is a 'body-blow' to Europe," Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance banking trade group, tweeted this week. "It undercuts Germany's growth model that's based on cheap Russian energy. Europe is facing a seismic shift, and (the) euro needs to fall to reflect that."

A European slowdown could eventually give the European Central Bank less leeway to raise rates and moderate economic growth to address its own inflation problem. The ECB has announced that it will raise its key interest rate by a quarter-point when it meets later this month and possibly by up to a half point in September. A weaker euro feeds inflationary pressures by making imports to Europe more expensive.

Analysts at UniCredit said global recession fears were a prime driver in foreign exchange markets "amid the general view that the Fed might ultimately have more opportunity than many other central banks" to raise rates. The analysts also noted the dollar's role as a globally recognized safe haven, in light of recent financial market turmoil, as another factor that's boosting demand for the buck.

In the meantime, the dollar's rise is complicating an already uncertain outlook for the United States, the world's biggest economy. On the one hand, the stronger greenback makes foreign goods less expensive for Americans and eases inflationary pressures. But not by much.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics calculates that a 10% rise in the dollar over the past year, against the currencies of its trading partners, reduced inflation by about 0.4 percentage point. Though Zandi calls that a "meaningful" impact, he notes that consumer prices have soared 8.6% over the past year, the biggest year-over-year gain since 1981.

And a sturdier currency takes a toll on U.S. companies that do business overseas. For one thing, it erodes the profits of multinational companies that rely on overseas sales. The stronger dollar makes their foreign revenue worth less when they convert it to dollars and bring it home the United States. Microsoft, for example, last month downgraded the outlook for its April-June earnings "due to unfavorable foreign exchange rate movement."

Worse, a stronger dollar makes U.S.-made products more expensive in overseas markets, while giving foreign products a price edge in the United States.

"The stronger dollar," Zandi said, "weighs on (economic) growth as it results in reduced exports, more imports and thus a wider trade deficit."

	<p>Indeed, a growing trade gap subtracted 3.2 percentage points from U.S. economic growth in the January-March period. That was the main reason why the nation's gross domestic product - the broadest gauge of economic output - shrank at a 1.6% annual rate in the first quarter.</p> <p>Economists say the risk of recession is already rising in the United States as the Fed raises borrowing costs and consumers deplete the savings they built up during the pandemic.</p> <p>"The strength of the dollar," said Eswar Prasad, an economist at Cornell University and the Brookings Institution, "will certainly do no favors for U.S. exporters."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 China targets state, local officials: influence
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/7/china-steps-influence-operations-state-local-offic/
GIST	<p>China is increasingly targeting American state and local officials in influence operations designed to further the objectives of the ruling Communist Party, according to a new report by a U.S. counterintelligence agency.</p> <p>"In partnering with any foreign entity, U.S. state and local leaders should exercise vigilance, conduct due diligence, and ensure transparency, integrity and accountability are built into the partnership to guard against potential foreign government exploitation," the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) stated in a report made public Wednesday.</p> <p>China's government invests heavily in conducting covert and overt influence operations targeting the United States through the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) United Front Work Department, the report said. The NCSC report said the efforts are continuing to focus on Washington, including lobbying against a major competitiveness bill targeting China now working its way through Congress.</p> <p>China "has also stepped up its efforts to cultivate U.S. state and local leaders in a strategy some have described as 'using the local to surround the central,'" the report said, adding that China's targeting of state and local officials can be an effective tool in promoting agenda that are more difficult at the national level.</p> <p>The CCP also exploits Chinese funding in state and local areas as a way to create dependencies that can produce influence in Washington. Chinese officials exploit American businesses' investments and desire for access to markets in China as leverage.</p> <p>The practice involves forcing American business leaders "to lobby Washington for policies Beijing favors."</p> <p>In 2020, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo first disclosed aggressive Chinese influence activities targeting regional officials in a speech to the National Governors Association.</p> <p>"The CCP is inside the gates here at home," Mr. Pompeo told The Washington Times, noting that not enough is being done to counter the threat.</p> <p>"As secretary of state, I alerted the world to this danger. While I'm encouraged that on consecutive days directors [FBI Director Christopher A.] Wray and [Director of National Intelligence Avril] Haines have identified this risk, sadly, the Biden team has not taken serious efforts to eliminate this risk to us all."</p> <p>Mr. Pompeo said he directed the closing of the Chinese consulate in Houston over spying activities, yet he contended that the Biden administration has done little to follow through on countering the espionage dangers.</p> <p>"Americans deserve leaders prepared to defend them here at home," he said.</p>

The report said Chinese influence operations against what it termed “subnational” officials is designed to pressure Washington to adopt policies favorable to Beijing. The Chinese believe U.S. state and local leaders are more independent from Washington and as a result can be used as proxies to promote pro-China policies, including greater bilateral economic cooperation and curbing American criticism of China’s policies toward Taiwan, Tibetans, Uyghurs, pro-democracy activists and others, the report said.

Entities in China for decades have linked to government and business leaders in U.S. states in mutually beneficial exchanges.

“However, as tensions between Beijing and Washington have grown, the government of the People’s Republic of China under President Xi Jinping has increasingly sought to exploit these China-U.S. subnational relationships to influence U.S. policies and advance PRC geopolitical interests,” the report said.

One case disclosed by Mr. Pompeo two years ago involved a Chinese consulate official in Chicago, Wu Ting, who sent an email to Wisconsin state Sen. Roger Roth with a draft resolution that the official wanted Mr. Roth to introduce in the Wisconsin legislature, praising China’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Roth deleted the email believing it to be a hoax. Ms. Wu sent a second email prompting the state legislator to respond with a single word: “Nuts.”

Mr. Pompeo said the influence effort is part of attempts to “collectively whitewash [China’s] culpability for a global pandemic.”

The Wisconsin influence operation was part of a large-scale operation targeting statehouses around the country by officials at Chinese embassies and consulates.

“We’ve seen them at PTA meetings,” Mr. Pompeo said in the speech. “They have been in full swing for years, and they’re increasing in intensity.”

Another case involved a California state senator who in 2017 proposed a bill voicing support for the Falun Gong Buddhist group that has been targeted by Beijing authorities as a cult. The Chinese officials at the consulate in San Francisco wrote the legislature in Sacramento and as a result the legislation was shelved.

China also carried out an influence operation targeting Rep. Eric Swalwell, California Democrat, who had an affair with a Chinese national named Fang Fang who helped with fundraising and placing an employee in the congressman’s office, Axios reported in 2020.

Release of the NCSC report follows a rare joint appearance in London this week by Mr. Wray and British MI5 Director General Ken McCallum warning of Chinese intelligence operations in the West.

A Chinese Embassy spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the speeches or report.

On the two intelligence leaders’ remarks, the spokesman referred to comments by Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian, who said in Beijing that the United States is “the biggest threat to world peace and development.” Mr. Zhao said Mr. Wray should “stop spreading lies, and stop making irresponsible remarks.”

Regarding Mr. McCallum’s comments, Mr. Zhao said both MI5 and the foreign intelligence service MI6 are “both experts on planting spies.” The MI5 chief’s remarks were “false, sensational reports” to stoke confrontation, he said.

Both officials said the threat posed by Chinese intelligence is increasing and includes theft of technology and business secrets.

Mr. Wray said the Chinese government is using intimidation and repression to shape the world to be more accommodating to China's campaign of theft.

"We consistently see that it's the Chinese government that poses the biggest long-term threat to our economic and national security, and by 'our,' I mean both of our nations, along with our allies in Europe and elsewhere," Mr. Wray said.

The FBI chief warned that Chinese government operations pose "an even more serious threat to Western businesses than even many sophisticated business people realize."

"The Chinese government is set on stealing your technology — whatever it is that makes your industry tick — and using it to undercut your business and dominate your market. And they're set on using every tool at their disposal to do it," he said.

Chinese intelligence agents are gathering private-sector information, using scores of agents who are not officially part of the Chinese government. The agents spot and assess sources of information to recruit and provide cover and communications in "helping steal secrets in other ways," Mr. Wray said.

Chinese hackers also are using cyberattacks to steal information.

Chinese companies also are used to steal information from American companies.

"So, when you deal with a Chinese company, know you're also dealing with the Chinese government — that is, the MSS and the PLA — too, almost like silent partners," Mr. Wray said, using the acronym for the spy service Ministry of State Security and the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army.

China in 2020 targeted U.S. companies in China through government-mandated tax software that injected spy malware in American business networks, Mr. Wray said. Joint human spying and cyberattacks by the Chinese also targeted the theft of COVID research from U.S. universities, he said.

"The danger China poses to companies isn't just complex. It's also getting worse," Mr. Wray said.

Mr. McCallum, the MI5 chief, said Chinese operations posed a "massive shared challenge."

The CCP is engaged in "aggression," stealing and legally acquiring technology, research and commercial secrets from businesses, he said.

"It means that if you are involved in cutting-edge tech, AI, advanced research or product development, the chances are your know-how is of material interest to the CCP," Mr. McCallum said.

One case involved a British precision engineering firm Smith Harlow that concluded a deal with China's Future's Aerospace. The Chinese company paid \$3.6 million for the firm's technology and then canceled the deal.

The MI5 director said Western assumptions that economic engagement with China would lead to greater political freedom there "have, I'm afraid, been shown to be plain wrong."

"But the Chinese Communist Party is interested in our democratic, media and legal systems. Not to emulate them, sadly, but to use them for its gain," he said.

The MI5, Britain's domestic intelligence service, issued an alert earlier this year to Parliament warning that a person linked to the United Front Work Department had penetrated the legislature, Mr. McCallum said.

	<p>“Through networks of this sort, the UFWD — described by Mao as one of the CCP’s ‘magic weapons’ — aims to amplify pro-CCP voices — and silence those that question the CCP’s legitimacy or authority,” he said.</p> <p>“This has very real consequences in communities here in the U.K. It needs to be challenged.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 UN warns: looming hunger catastrophe
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/07/un-hunger-crisis-ukraine-russia-blockade
GIST	<p>A looming hunger catastrophe is set to explode over the next two years, creating the risk of unprecedented global political pressure, the executive director of the UN World Food Programme has warned.</p> <p>Calling for short- and long-term reforms – including an urgent lifting of the blockade on 25m tonnes of Ukrainian grain trapped by a Russian blockade – David Beasley said the current food affordability crisis is likely to turn into an even more dangerous food availability crisis next year unless solutions are found.</p> <p>The number of people classed as “acutely food insecure” by the UN before the Covid crisis was 130 million, but after Covid this number rose to 276 million.</p> <p>Writing a preface to a new pamphlet from the Blair Institute on the looming hunger crisis, Beasley says: “This number has increased to 345 million due to the Ukraine crisis. And a staggering 50 million people in 45 countries are now just one step from famine.</p> <p>“The international community must act to stop this looming hunger catastrophe in its tracks – or these numbers will explode.</p> <p>“Global food markets have been plunged into turmoil, with soaring prices, export bans and shortages of basic foodstuffs spreading far from Ukraine’s borders. Nations across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and even Latin America are feeling the heat from this conflict.”</p> <p>Beasley says that threats to global food security have been exacerbated by the upheaval in worldwide fuel and fertiliser markets.</p> <p>“Without urgent action, food production and crop yields will be slashed. This raises the frightening possibility that on top of today’s food-pricing crisis, the world will also face a genuine crisis of food availability over the next 12 to 24 months – and with it, the spectre of multiple famines.”</p> <p>Food prices reached a 10-year high in 2022, although there has been a slight easing in the past two months. The crisis has been stoked by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its Black Sea blockade preventing crucial grain exports.</p> <p>Launching the pamphlet A Global Crisis, Tony Blair told the Guardian the food crisis now hitting poor countries in Africa, Middle east and Asia “is absolutely likely to cause serious unrest in the same way as it did before the Arab Spring”.</p> <p>He said: “There is a real risk that this is not simply a problem just for this year but could be worse next year because of the huge problems next year in getting food fertilisers to make the crops succeed.</p> <p>“This is going to affect millions of people and has to be brought centre stage at the G20 in a way it is not at present. It is understandable when leaders are concentrating on their own cost of living crisis, but I can tell you from my contacts that this issue is a big preoccupation of African leaders.”</p> <p>An increasing concern is the lack of fertilisers, and their escalating price. In 2021 Russia supplied 23% of African fertiliser imports, doubling its 2020 share, leaving Africa dangerously exposed just as Europe has been exposed by its reliance on Russian gas.</p>

This means, the pamphlet says, “that it’s not just Ukraine from where next year’s harvest – and more to come – will be impacted by the Russian invasion. The soaring price of fertilisers limits the ability of countries to boost their own agricultural productivity just when it is most critical that they make up for a drop in global grain exports.”

The grain crisis is likely to be a major source of conflict at a meeting of G20 foreign ministers in Bali, the first time Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, has confronted his western opponents collectively since the crisis began. The US hopes to finally skewer Russia’s false excuses over the blockade.

But many eastern European countries are deeply sceptical that Vladimir Putin is serious about finding a solution to the Black Sea grain blockade. One foreign minister from central Europe said, “Putin wants to start a fire in Africa and the Middle East, and he does not care about the consequences. It is a deliberate strategy.”

The minister doubted Putin was sincere about a solution to the blockade, pointing out that the UN and Turkish efforts at mediation on a naval convoy had already lasted a month and not yet succeeded.

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, told G7 leaders more than a week ago that the moment of truth in the mediation had been reached, yet there has been no subsequent breakthrough. Putin seems only willing to lift the blockade of Ukraine’s grain-exporting ports if wider Russian sanctions are lifted, Boris Johnson indicated this week.

Poland and other countries are urging the EU to recognise the blockade cannot be lifted by negotiation or by force and should instead focus on exporting the grain by train through Poland. This would require a long-term contract being given to Polish and Baltic ports for them to make the necessary investments.

Official figures on the precise additional impact of the Ukrainian port blockade differ, but UN officials on Wednesday said the conflict will mean an extra 13 million severely malnourished this year and 17 million in 2023. It suggested that if the blockade is not lifted by October, and the next harvest, as much as 70m of grain in Ukraine could be trapped.

The Blair team agree that lifting the blockade will not alone undo the damage that’s already been done to global food security, saying: “This is a crisis that will play out over years, not months.”

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HEADLINE	07/07 ‘Headed in bad direction’: BA.5 subvariant
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/08/usa-omicron-variant-covid-wave
GIST	<p>The BA.5 version of Covid-19 has become the majority variant of the virus in America in a matter of weeks, in a troubling development that comes amidst what may already be America’s second-largest wave of the pandemic.</p> <p>It also comes at a time when much of the US has relaxed nearly all Covid restrictions in public and life has largely returned to normal.</p> <p>“Covid-19 is very clearly not over. We’re seeing dramatic increases in the number of cases and hospitalizations in many places throughout the United States,” said Jason Salemi, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of South Florida’s College of Public Health.</p> <p>As BA.5, one of the Omicron sub-variants, begins buffeting the US, “we’re headed in a bad direction”, Salemi said. “We’ve seen it coming for a while ... We’ve seen it go pretty unabated.”</p> <p>More than one in three Americans live in a county at medium risk from Covid, and one in five are at high risk, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) . That’s the highest proportion of the country facing risks since February, Salemi said.</p>

There are now more than 100,000 new cases of Covid [confirmed](#) in the US every day – a rate that has been fairly steady for the past six weeks. While cases in the Northeast have slowed, surges are now hitting other parts of the country.

At the same time, hospitalizations have [increased](#) steadily since its lowest pandemic dip in April – though the rise has not been as sharp or the peak as high as previous waves.

“The older you are, the much more likely you are to be hospitalized,” said Salemi. “But hospitalizations are increasing for every age group.”

Hospitalizations tend to lag behind cases by a few days. But an apparently stable rate of cases with increasing hospitalization means something else seems to be at play, experts said – likely waning immunity in the face of a more contagious, immune-evasive, and pathogenic variant.

The virus is evolving to evade the protection from infection offered by vaccination or recovery from previous illness with Covid and it seems to be more transmissible as well.

The immune-evasive properties of the evolving variants makes new waves more likely, says Tulio de Oliveira, director of the Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation at Stellenbosch University and the lead of the Network for Genomic Surveillance in South Africa.

“BA.4 and 5 are potentially the variants that can break through immunity the easiest,” he said. They are “really capable of reinfection”.

In South Africa, BA.1 – the first omicron variant – offered very little protection against being infected with BA.4 and BA.5, de Oliveira said. The antibodies generated by an infection with BA.1 do not protect against reinfection after two or three months, according to laboratory [research](#).

Infection with BA.2 did seem to offer some protection, possibly because that wave was more recent, he said.

But while immunity against infection seems low, prior immunity still holds up well against severe outcomes like hospitalization and death.

People who have been vaccinated and those who were previously infected “easily acquire BA.4 and BA.5, but they will develop very little disease,” de Oliveira said.

In a preprint study on hamsters, the new variants seem much more virulent and pathogenic than previous omicron variants. But South Africa didn’t see more severity from BA.4 and 5 than it did during its other omicron waves.

That’s because the severity of these variants depends on immunity levels in addition to their intrinsic properties. “Now [severity] is a property not only of the variant itself, but the variant and the population that it encounters,” de Oliveira said.

Even before this surge, some 95% of South Africans were estimated to have protection from vaccination or previous bouts with Covid.

“We believe that this hybrid immunity in South Africa is what kept our BA.4 and BA.5 wave with very low hospitalizations and deaths,” said de Oliveira.

Even if variants are more pathogenic in the lab, high levels of immunity can help keep severe illness at bay. That’s why staying up-to-date on vaccination is key.

“The first and second booster are very important,” Salemi said.

Yet only 34% of eligible Americans – those above the age of 5 – have received booster doses as recommended by the CDC. While first booster uptake has been better among older Americans, the age group at highest risk, second booster uptake has been extremely low.

“There’s a lot of opportunity for waning immunity and waning protection from the vaccine, without those booster doses, to allow these new circulating variants with some maybe more concerning characteristics to do a little bit more damage,” Salemi said. Waning immunity coupled with a more immune-evasive variant means “you can start seeing a pickup in some of these indicators of severe illness”.

Deaths in South Africa also remained low in large part because hospitals weren’t overwhelmed. “When the BA.4 and BA.5 waves started, we had completely empty ICUs – so anyone that became sick could have good support,” de Oliveira said.

“That will be key in the US,” he said. “It’s very different if a new wave comes and the hospitals are already overwhelmed.” That’s one reason why the Delta wave was so deadly, because it lingered for a long time and kept hospitals full, he said.

Pockets of the US with poor immunity levels – including those who haven’t recently been vaccinated or recovered from the virus – could see more severe illness. But places with high vaccination rates and recent surges will likely fare better when it comes to hospitalization and death, he said.

In South Africa, the wave came quickly and ended quickly as well – but it had significant economic effects, with people not being able to work due to illness.

To keep the effects of a surge, including the risk of economic disruption and long-term issues like long Covid, to a minimum, Americans need to “bring the numbers down as expeditiously as we can”, Salemi said.

That includes taking the same measures that have proven to help manage the virus in the past: vaccines, masks, distancing, ventilation, tests.

“Please don’t think about mitigation as all or none,” Salemi said. “There are simple steps that we can take to dramatically reduce risks – not only for ourselves and our family, but for a lot of those members in our community who are very vulnerable.”

As each infection offers new opportunities for the virus to evolve and escape immunity, scientists and officials across the world must continue monitoring it, de Oliveira said.

“This virus has surprised us far too many times.”

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HEADLINE	07/08 Day 135 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/08/russia-ukraine-war-update-what-we-know-on-day-135-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, warned Moscow had barely started its campaign in Ukraine and dared the west to try to defeat it on the battlefield. Putin said the prospects for any negotiation would grow dimmer the longer the conflict dragged on, during a speech to parliamentary leaders. “Everyone should know that, by and large, we haven’t started anything yet in earnest,” he said. “The further it goes, the harder it will be for them to negotiate with us.”• Three people were killed and another five wounded after Russian forces fired rockets at Kharkiv, officials said. The regional governor, Oleh Synyehubov, said a district in the north-eastern Ukrainian city was shelled on Thursday.• At least one person was been killed and six injured by a missile strike on Kramatorsk which hit a residential area, according to Ukraine’s regional governor of

Donetsk. [“This is a deliberate attack on civilians,” Pavlo Kyrylenko said](#), adding that this would not stop until the Russians were stopped.

- **The mayor of Sloviansk said his city near Kramatorsk had come under Russian fire.** [Some residents were injured, said Vadym Lyakh](#), without providing further details. Ukraine’s military said pressure was intensifying with heavy shelling on Sloviansk and nearby populated areas.
- **Russia’s defence ministry has said it killed Ukrainian servicemen who were trying to raise Ukraine’s flag on the recently retaken Snake Island.** Authorities in Odesa appeared to confirm [that missiles had struck the island](#), and that [Russians had also destroyed two grain hangars in the region](#) which contained “about 35 tonnes of grain”. Ukraine has denied reports any of its servicemen were killed.
- **Foreign analysts say Russia may be temporarily easing its offensive in eastern Ukraine in an “operational pause”** as its forces attempt to reassemble for a new assault. Russian forces made no claimed or assessed territorial gains in Ukraine on Wednesday “for the first time in 133 days of war”, according to the Institute for the Study of War.
- **Ukraine has summoned the Turkish ambassador** after it said Turkey had allowed a Russian-flagged ship carrying thousands of tonnes of allegedly stolen Ukrainian grain to leave the port of Karasu. [Turkish customs officials had seized the vessel](#) at Ukraine’s request on Tuesday, [after Kyiv said the cargo was illegally transporting 7,000 tonnes of grain](#) out of Russian-occupied Berdiansk, a port in Ukraine’s south-east.
- **The UN has warned of a “looming hunger catastrophe” due to Russia’s blockade on Ukrainian grain.** Patrick Beasley, director of the UN World Food Program, said a hunger catastrophe was set to explode over the next two years and called for an urgent lifting of the blockade on 25m tonnes of Ukrainian grain trapped by a Russian blockade.
- **Investigators in Ukraine said they had foiled a criminal gang that forced women into sex work abroad** after luring them with false advertisements for legitimate employment. Authorities in Kyiv arrested the suspected leader of the gang [after months of surveillance resulted in them stopping a woman](#) as she was about to cross the border.
- **Russian prosecutors have called for prison sentences for a prominent opposition activist and for a Moscow city council member** who opposes the invasion of Ukraine. Alexei Gorinov faces up to 15 years in prison for spreading “knowingly false information” about the Russian army. Gorinov criticised Moscow’s military actions in Ukraine at a city council meeting in March.
- **US basketball player Brittney Griner has pleaded guilty to drugs charges in a Russian court**, but said she had not deliberately broken the law. [Griner faces up to 10 years in prison under the charge](#). Russia’s deputy foreign minister, [Sergei Ryabkov, said “hype” around Griner’s case did not help](#) and suggested Washington be silent about her fate.
- **Russia’s foreign minister has flown to the Indonesian island of Bali for a gathering of G20 foreign ministers.** The gathering, [which is likely to be overshadowed by Moscow’s war in Ukraine](#) and deep divisions within the bloc over how to respond to the crisis, will mark the first time that Sergei Lavrov has met counterparts from nations that are strongly critical of the war.
- **Boris Johnson spoke with Volodymyr Zelenskiy “to reiterate the United Kingdom’s steadfast support” in light of his resignation** as British prime minister, Downing Street said. In his resignation speech outside No 10, [Johnson addressed the people of Ukraine directly](#) and promised that “the UK will continue to back your fight for freedom for as long as it takes”.
- **Johnson’s resignation has been met with sadness in Kyiv**, most notably by Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who said the PM has been a “true friend of Ukraine”. [Ukraine expected Britain’s support to continue](#) despite Johnson’s resignation, Zelenskiy’s office said. Mikhail Podolyak, a key adviser to Zelenskiy, [thanked Johnson for “always being at the forefront of supporting Ukraine”](#).
- **Johnson’s downfall has been met with delight and ridicule in Moscow**, with a Kremlin spokesperson saying: [“He doesn’t like us. We don’t like him either.”](#) Russia’s ambassador to Britain, Andrei Kelin, said [Moscow would prefer someone “not so antagonistic”](#) to lead the UK.

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/07/canada-police-spyware-admission-surveillance-experts
GIST	<p>An admission from Canada's national police force that it routinely uses powerful spyware to surveil citizens has prompted concern from experts, who warn the country is "asleep at the wheel" when it comes to regulating and reining in use of the technology.</p> <p>During a parliamentary session in late June, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police submitted a document outlining how a special investigative team covertly infiltrates the mobile devices of Canadians. The tools, which have been used on at least 10 investigations between 2018 and 2020, give the police access to text messages, email, photos, videos, audio files, calendar entries and financial records. The software can also remotely turn on the camera and microphone of a suspect's phone or laptop.</p> <p>The RCMP, which has long evaded questions over whether it uses spyware to track Canadians, provided the information about its "on-device investigative tools" in response to a question from a Conservative lawmaker about how the federal government collects data on its citizens.</p> <p>Ron Deibert, a political science professor at the university of Toronto and head of Citizen Lab, said the spyware, which gives police an "extraordinary window into every aspect of someone's personal life" is akin to "nuclear-level technology" – but has little government oversight.</p> <p>"There's a culture of secrecy that pervades the intelligence and law enforcement community in this country," he said</p> <p>Deibert, one the world's leading experts on the surveillance techniques used by authoritarian regimes, said he and others have long suspected police and government agencies in Canada were using the technology. But absent from the disclosure was any indication of who the government is purchasing the software from.</p> <p>"That's my biggest unanswered question," he said. "Because we know there are some companies that are horrible when it comes to due diligence and routinely sell to governments that use it for grotesque human rights violations."</p> <p>Last year, a collaborative investigation between the Guardian and other major international outlets, called the Pegasus Project, revealed that spyware licensed by the Israeli firm NSO Group had been used to hack smartphones belonging to journalists, lawyers and human rights activists.</p> <p>In 2021 the commerce department in the United States announced it had placed mercenary spyware companies like NSO on the country's Entity List, effectively blacklisting them for their "malicious cyber activities" amid growing concern from US officials that the software posed a grave risk to national security.</p> <p>In contrast, Canadian authorities have shown little appetite to take similar action, said Deibert, who has briefed senior Canadian officials within successive governments.</p> <p>"Developing export controls and putting more transparency and accountability around procurement practice is a no-brainer," he said.</p> <p>The RCMP says it only uses the tools when less intrusive means have failed. In the document, the police force claims it needs to use spyware because new technologies, like end-to-end encryption, make it "exponentially more difficult for the RCMP to conduct court-authorized electronic surveillance".</p> <p>But privacy advocates disagree.</p> <p>"The creation of the metaphor of 'police investigations going dark' because of advances in technology is the public relations coup of the 21st century," said Brenda McPhail, director of the privacy technology and surveillance program for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. "The case has not been made to the public for the use of this powerful spyware, particularly given the profoundly dangerous uses of this technology around the world."</p>

McPhail points to previous instances in which the RCMP has been evasive and misleading about the technology it uses for surveillance, including a recent controversy over [mobile device identifiers, known as IMSI catchers or stingrays](#). In September 2017, Canada’s privacy commissioner found the police agency had broken the law six times when it used the technology.

“The policy has been, we’re going to do what we can and in secret. If it comes out, then we’ll see what we can do to mitigate the harm,” said McPhail.

In the parliamentary document, the RCMP says it didn’t consult the federal privacy commissioner before using the technology – but said it nonetheless needs the approval of a judge when monitoring Canadians.

The latest revelations about police surveillance power once again highlight the need for a debate over the “crisis of accountability” in law enforcement, said McPhail.

“We need to be having a conversation about what kinds of surveillance technologies – invasive tools being used without any evidence of due process or due consideration of the rights and freedoms of people – are acceptable in a democracy and under what conditions. And we need to determine what sort of safeguards there need to be as well.”

Plans to modernize the Privacy Act in the coming months give lawmakers a window of opportunity to adopt the right legislative framework to ensure police have access to tools they need for investigative work, said McPhail, and not broad powers “shrouded by secrecy” and without public accountability.

“The devices we hold in our hands are generally designed to extract as much personal information from us as they possibly can,” said Deibert. But a documented history of police abusing surveillance tools in the country meant that the recent admissions of the use of mercenary spyware should be enough to trigger an investigation into whether there is proper oversight to prevent abuse, he added.

“Private companies and banks presumably know a lot about your preferences, but only the government can take away your freedom and put you in jail. Only the government can end your life in some jurisdictions,” he said. “That’s why there should be a higher threshold for public accountability and transparency when these tools are used by state agencies.”

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HEADLINE	07/07 Seattle metro wages 31% above average
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/average-hourly-wage-seattle-metro-workers-31-above-national-average-statistics-show/CQ6MW3APQJBS3ECYUNGXDLCKQA/
GIST	<p>Workers in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metro area earned an average hourly wage of \$36.62 in May 2021, about 31% higher than the national average of \$28.01, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics announced Thursday.</p> <p>The data looked at the wages and salaries of 1,917,560 area employees working in a wide variety of occupational groups, including management, business and financial operations, computer and mathematics, legal, and more.</p> <p>Wages in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metro in May 2021 were higher than the national average in 21 of the 22 major occupational groups.</p> <p>Management was the highest paying occupational group, earning an average of \$73.64 an hour, followed by computer and mathematical occupations at \$62.45 an hour.</p> <p>Computer and mathematical occupations account for more than 8% of the workforce in the metro area, significantly higher than the 3.3% share nationally.</p>

	Among the computer and mathematical occupations, software developer was the most common job, with 73,860 workers.
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HEADLINE	07/07 Russia Donetsk strike prelude to full assault
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/07/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#russian-strikes-kill-civilians-in-donetsk-officials-say-but-a-fuller-assault-may-be-yet-to-come
GIST	<p>Even as Russian forces pummel towns and villages in Donetsk Province with deadly rocket attacks and airstrikes, military experts say the strikes are most likely only the prelude to a full-scale assault.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin’s forces are laying the groundwork for an onslaught, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a research group based in Washington, which said that on Wednesday, for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, it claimed no territorial gains.</p> <p>Still, Russia’s attacks in Donetsk in recent days have caused heavy damage. At least seven civilians were killed in the last 24 hours, including a 17-year-old girl found under rubble, local authorities said on Thursday. In Kramatorsk, which serves as Ukraine’s administrative and military center in the province, a rocket struck a residential area in the center of the city around midday, killing one person and wounding six others, officials there said.</p> <p>The Institute for the Study of War said in its Wednesday assessment that while Russian forces may have “initiated an operational pause” in Donetsk, it did not mean that Russia had “ceased active hostilities.”</p> <p>Instead, the report said, Moscow’s troops “will likely confine themselves to relatively small-scale offensive actions as they attempt to set conditions for a more significant offensive.”</p> <p>A spokesman for Russia’s defense ministry confirmed that assessment on Thursday, saying at a news conference that Russian troops had been given an “opportunity to rest” in order to “replenish their combat capabilities,” according to the Russian state news agency Tass.</p> <p>In an interview with CNN on Thursday, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine cast doubt on whether Russian forces were pausing at all. He said it was “clear” that Ukraine would not recapture all of its lost territory, but rejected the possibility of officially ceding land conquered by Russia in exchange for peace. He also vowed that Ukraine would regain some areas.</p> <p>“Ukrainians are not ready to give up their land as new territories of the Russian Federation,” he said. “This is our land. We have always said this, and we will never give it up.”</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky questioned what Russia had gained by its capture of Luhansk Province last week: “I don’t even understand what exactly they’re controlling there. They ruined towns, school. They are the occupiers of the rubble?”</p> <p>Moscow is now turning its attention to Donetsk Province, which lies southwest of Luhansk. After victory in Luhansk, military experts said that Russia would rotate troops out and bring in fresh ones.</p> <p>A report on Thursday by British military intelligence said that while heavy shelling continued on the front line in Donetsk, Russian forces had made few advances and were “likely reconstituting” their operations.</p> <p>Since April, after its forces were routed from northern Ukraine, Russia has narrowed its focus to capturing the whole of the Donbas region, which comprises Luhansk and Donetsk provinces. Russia’s strategy has been to pound its targets for weeks before launching a ground assault, a method that worked in Luhansk Province.</p>

	<p>The head of Donetsk’s military administration, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said on Thursday on the Telegram social messaging app that civilians died in the city of Siversk and in three other locations to the south. “Two more people were injured,” he said, without giving details.</p> <p>Later, Oleksandr Goncharenko, the mayor of Kramatorsk, said a Russian airstrike hit the city’s center.</p> <p>“We are investigating the consequences,” he said. “Rescue services are working. Stay in the shelters, the danger has not passed.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 G20 foreign ministers convene in Bali
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/08/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#g20-foreign-ministers-convene-in-bali-as-russia-prepares-for-an-assault-on-donetsk-in-eastern-ukraine
GIST	<p>Foreign ministers from Group of 20 nations are meeting in Bali on Friday to discuss some of the world’s most pressing challenges, including the war in Ukraine, just as Russia prepares for an onslaught on the Donetsk region in the eastern part of the country.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken was also expected to meet in Bali with China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, and reiterate American warnings that Beijing not supply Moscow with weapons for its war effort in Ukraine or help it evade Western sanctions.</p> <p>China has already increased its purchases of Russian oil, albeit at a discount, helping President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia maintain high oil revenues even in the face of huge sanctions.</p> <p>Also attending the summit is Russia’s foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, with whom Mr. Blinken has not spoken since mid-January, before Russia’s February invasion of Ukraine. State Department officials said that Mr. Blinken had no intention of engaging his Russian counterpart in Bali.</p> <p>“We would like to have the Russians give us a reason to meet on a bilateral basis with them, with Foreign Minister Lavrov, but the only thing we have seen emanate from Moscow is more brutality and aggression against the people and country of Ukraine,” a State Department spokesman, Ned Price, told reporters on Tuesday.</p> <p>In Ukraine, even as Russian forces pummel towns and villages in Donetsk with deadly rocket attacks and airstrikes, military experts say the strikes are most likely only the prelude to a full-scale assault. Mr. Putin’s forces are laying the groundwork for an onslaught, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a research group based in Washington.</p> <p>Still, Russia’s attacks in Donetsk in recent days have caused heavy damage. The local authorities said on Thursday that at least seven civilians had been killed in the previous 24 hours, including a 17-year-old girl found under rubble. In Kramatorsk, which serves as Ukraine’s administrative and military center in the province, a rocket struck a residential area in the center of the city around midday, killing one person and wounding six others, officials there said.</p> <p>A report on Thursday by British military intelligence said that while heavy shelling continued on the front line in Donetsk, Russian forces had made few advances and were “likely reconstituting” their operations.</p> <p>Western countries have increased the flow of weapons to Ukraine, including long-range missiles capable of hitting Russian positions and infrastructure. The most advanced of these is the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, supplied by the United States, the first of which have just started to be deployed.</p>

	<p>Senators Lindsey Graham and Richard Blumenthal traveled on Thursday to Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, where, after meeting Ukraine's president, they said they would push Congress to send more weapons to the country to fight Russia.</p> <p>"A counteroffensive is possible soon if we give the Ukrainians the right weapons," said Mr. Graham, a Republican of South Carolina. He said he believed the United States would "send another package of military aid and humanitarian assistance to keep this fight going."</p> <p>The ultimate Russian objective in the Donbas region, which includes Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk Province, is to capture Kramatorsk, the site of Ukraine's regional administration since 2014, when separatists seized territory in the two provinces and established self-declared republics backed by Moscow. During the eight years of conflict that followed, Ukrainian forces built elaborate defensive positions designed to make Russian forces pay dearly for any further attempts to seize territory.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Texas: pick up, return migrants to border
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/us/abbott-texas-migrants.html
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — Gov. Greg Abbott on Thursday ordered the Texas National Guard and the state police to begin apprehending migrants who illegally cross the border from Mexico and taking them back to ports of entry, a move that could put the state into direct conflict with the federal government over immigration.</p> <p>Mr. Abbott, in a statement, said the goal was to return "illegal immigrants to the border to stop this criminal enterprise endangering our communities."</p> <p>The order, which significantly expanded the potential activity of Guard troops and state police personnel along the border, came amid mounting pressure on Mr. Abbott from conservatives and Republicans to take even more drastic action to address the record number of arrivals from Mexico. Federal agents recorded 240,000 crossings in May, the majority of those in Texas, though recently the daily numbers have gone down slightly, an official said, citing internal data.</p> <p>This week, Texas officials from counties at or near the border have called on the governor to act, and the lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, has urged Mr. Abbott to have state law enforcement personnel "put hands on people and send them back," likening the numbers of migrants arriving in Mexico to the attack on Pearl Harbor during World War II.</p> <p>Republicans outside Texas have also pushed Mr. Abbott. "Texas should just send them back across the border," Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida said during a news conference last month.</p> <p>Immigration has historically been the purview of the federal government, and states have refrained from seeking to enforce federal immigration laws themselves, particularly after a Supreme Court ruling a decade ago knocked down an effort by Arizona to do so.</p> <p>Mr. Abbott has so far stopped short of what many of his conservative critics have called for: a formal declaration of an "invasion" that, proponents argue, would allow the governor to seize war powers and have state law enforcement personnel not only take migrants back to the border but directly deport them.</p> <p>Indeed, the first criticisms of his order came not from immigration advocates or civil rights groups but from a former top Department of Homeland Security official under the Trump administration, Ken Cuccinelli, who implied that the governor's order did not go far enough. Mr. Cuccinelli has been actively calling for Mr. Abbott to make the invasion declaration.</p> <p>"The governor does not appear to formally declare an invasion nor direct the National Guard and Department of Public Safety to remove illegals across the border directly to Mexico," read a joint statement from Mr. Cuccinelli and Russ Vought, the president of the Center for Renewing America, a conservative nonprofit group. "That is critical. Otherwise this is still catch and release."</p>

RAICES, a Texas nonprofit that provides legal services to migrants, said in a statement that the order was a “disgusting political stunt” and “unlawful” and called for the Department of Justice “to intervene immediately.”

While Mr. Abbott has previously deployed thousands of National Guard members to the border, the troops have largely acted as lookouts, calling federal Border Patrol agents when they spot unauthorized migrants arriving.

In his order on Thursday, Mr. Abbott appeared ready to test the bounds of the law around immigration enforcement, declaring that the Supreme Court, in a 2012 case, had not specifically addressed whether a state could detain someone on suspicion of immigration offenses or whether federal law would prohibit that.

“This is setting up a test case,” said Stephen Vladeck, a law professor at the University of Texas at Austin. The Supreme Court rejected a similar effort by Arizona in 2012 to set immigration enforcement priorities, he said.

“But this is a different Supreme Court,” he added. “If you’re Texas, you might think, ‘Here’s a good opportunity to see if there’s still a majority for that precedent.’”

The governor’s order went into effect immediately, but officials said the practical details of how it would be fulfilled were still being worked out.

It appeared likely to complicate relations between state law enforcement officers and federal agents, who routinely work together along the border.

Mr. Abbott’s office directed inquiries to the National Guard and to the Department of Public Safety, neither of which responded to a request for comment. The Department of Homeland Security and the Border Patrol also did not immediately comment on the order.

A White House spokesman cast doubt on the governor’s order by criticizing his record on immigration. “His so-called Operation Lone Star put national guardsmen and law enforcement in dangerous situations and resulted in a logistical nightmare needing federal rescue,” said the spokesman, Abdullah Hasan.

Several questions remain about how the order would be carried out on the ground. It was not clear, for example, how far from the border migrants would be apprehended, how they would be identified and what would happen to them once they were deposited at the ports of entry, which are at a series of bridges between Mexico and Texas.

Also unclear was how the order would dovetail with Mr. Abbott’s existing efforts to address the arrival of migrants to Texas, one of which calls for law enforcement officers to charge those found on private ranches with trespassing. It was not expected to affect a state program in which migrants already processed by the Border Patrol have been offered rides to Washington or elsewhere on buses chartered by the state.

Kate Huddleston, a staff attorney at the A.C.L.U. of Texas, said that the order would encourage state law enforcement officers “to racially profile Black and brown people” and that it “recklessly fans the flames of hate in our state.”

Mr. Abbott has said that his administration is considering taking the further step of invoking war powers in order to deport unauthorized migrants but that there are legal concerns. Among them, he said, was the possibility that doing so could “expose law enforcement in the state of Texas to being prosecuted” by the federal government.

But anger among conservatives has grown, particularly among those in communities near the border.

	<p>On Tuesday, several county leaders held a news conference and declared, among themselves, that the surge of migrants constituted an invasion.</p> <p>“We are here to change that,” said one of the county leaders, Tully Shahan, the top executive in Kinney County. “We don’t want to lose America. The Biden administration can stop this thing this hour. They can stop it now.”</p> <p>Mike Bennett, the top executive in Goliad County, addressed Mr. Abbott directly, saying, “I ask the governor to step up today and deal with these people at the border.”</p> <p>Mr. Abbott’s plan appeared similar to a tactic used recently by the sheriff of Kinney County, Brad Coe, who said he had driven several migrants from his county to a bridge in the border city of Eagle Pass and left them there.</p> <p>“We returned four to the port of entry in Mexico so they could return home,” Mr. Coe said during the Tuesday news conference. “There was no deportation. We picked them up, put them in the truck and took them home.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Retailers scale back hiring; slowdown fear
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Retailers-scale-back-hiring-as-worry-about-a-17289865.php
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — After going on a frenzied hiring spree for a year and a half to meet surging shopper demand, America's retailers are starting to temper their recruiting.</p> <p>The changing mindset comes as companies confront a pullback in consumer spending, the prospect of an economic downturn and surging labor costs. Some analysts suggest that merchants have also learned to do more with fewer workers.</p> <p>The nation's top employer, Walmart, said it recently over-hired because of a COVID-related staffing shortage and then reduced its head count through attrition. In April, Amazon said it, too, had decided that it had an excess of workers in its warehouses. And FedEx, whose customers include big retailers, said late last month that it was hiring fewer people.</p> <p>In addition, new data shows that retailers in recent months have been scaling back sign-on bonuses and are no longer relaxing job requirements — a sign that they no longer feel compelled to expand their applicant pool, according to the labor analytics company Lightcast. And Snagajob, an online marketplace for hourly work, reports that job postings in retailing have been slowing in the past couple of months, though they remain up from a year ago.</p> <p>Retailers "are going to take a conservative view of what’s possible and what’s necessary, because the price they will pay for being wrong will be minimum if they run out of goods and don’t have enough staff, and massive if they wind up with an inventory glut and they have too many people employed,” said Mark Cohen, director of retail studies at Columbia University and a former CEO of Sears Canada.</p> <p>The easing of retail hiring is happening in a labor market that has undergone volatile swings throughout the recovery from the pandemic recession of 2020. Early on, companies like Amazon, Target and Walmart that provide necessities and goods for the home stepped up their hiring to meet a crushing demand from online shoppers. At the same time, stores like Macy’s and Nordstrom whose clothing lines were considered non-essential by many at the time, temporarily laid off workers during nationwide lockdowns.</p> <p>The pullback in retail hiring comes against the backdrop of a still-robust national job market. On Friday, the government is expected to report that America's employers added 275,000 jobs in June, according to economists surveyed by the data provide FactSet. That would amount to a solid gain, though it would be the smallest monthly total in more than a year. It would suggest that the pace of hiring may be easing —</p>

something the Federal Reserve has been hoping for as it looks to slow the economy and curb high inflation.

The unemployment rate for June is expected to have remained 3.6%, just above the half-century low that preceded the pandemic and a sign that the demand for workers, economy-wide, is still strong.

The job market became extremely tight starting in the spring of 2021, after the country emerged from the lockdowns and people, many of them newly vaccinated, were eager to shop and dine out again. At the same time, many workers were reassessing their jobs and whether the long hours were worth the paycheck, and some decided not to return to their employers.

In May, the retail industry shed about 61,000 positions, though overall employment in the sector is still 159,000 above its pre-pandemic February 2020 level. Jack Kleinhenz, chief economist at the National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, said he believes the decline is more of an aberration. In a most recent report on job departures, he noted, there were 1.1 million retail job openings even while about 730,000 people in retail were receiving unemployment benefits. That meant that retail job openings vastly exceeded the number of people claiming unemployment benefits.

But shifting consumer behavior is already weighing on retailers and other types of businesses as well. Netflix and Peloton have announced layoffs, for example while technology behemoths like Facebook's parent Meta Platforms Inc. and Uber Technologies say they have moderated their hiring plans. Such a pullback, if replicated elsewhere, might herald a broader scaling-back of hiring across the economy and, eventually, help slow the economy and ease high inflation.

The latest round of retail earnings reports show how surging inflation in gas and other necessities is making shoppers, particularly lower-income households, avoid discretionary purchases and focus more on basics. The Fed's recent interest rate hikes, meant to curb inflation, should depress spending even more by making it more expensive for consumers and businesses to take out loans. Shoppers have increasingly shifted away from purchases they spent heavily on during the pandemic for their home, like appliances and furniture, to services like restaurants as dining out becomes normal again.

With online shopping slowing, some affected retailers are retrenching. Amazon, which doubled the size of its operations and nearly doubled its workforce in the past two years, is letting some of its warehouses leases expire and deferring construction on others, according to CEO Andy Jassy. The e-commerce giant also reportedly plans to sublease its excess space. Experts say Amazon and others may decide to find uses for their excess labor as the holiday shopping season approaches.

In the meantime, plenty of small businesses are lagging behind in hiring compared with their bigger rivals. Squeezed by supply chain disruptions and labor shortages, many smaller retailers were unable to stock enough merchandise or hire enough people.

"They're still clawing their way back, whereas some of these over-large companies are now discovering they have a hangover," said Cohen, the retail analyst.

Sadie Cherney, owner of Clothes Mentor, which operates three women's resale boutiques in South Carolina, noted that staffing shortages that it faced in the past 18 months have created "burnout" among her long-time employees. Cherney has raised pay and provided more flexible scheduling than her competitors. Yet only about 15% to 30% of its scheduled job candidates show up for their interviews. That's why store hours of operation aren't yet fully restored to their pre-pandemic levels.

Now, on top of labor shortages, Cherney said, customers are pulling back on their spending.

"We do see uncertainty in the future as a concern, so we aren't looking to scale or expand at this time," she said. "But we do hope to return to our staffing levels from 2019."

HEADLINE	07/07 NASA condemns Russia space agency
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/07/07/nasa-russia-ukraine-space-station-rebuke/
GIST	<p>NASA on Thursday issued a rare condemnation of the Russian space agency, its main partner on the International Space Station, after cosmonauts celebrated Russia's capture of a region of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>In a statement, the U.S. space agency said it “strongly rebukes using the International Space Station for political purposes to support [the] war against Ukraine, which is fundamentally inconsistent with the station’s primary function among the 15 international participating countries to advance science and develop technology for peaceful purposes.”</p> <p>On Monday, the Russian space agency posted photos of its three cosmonauts posing with the flags of the Luhansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic — self-proclaimed republics in breakaway regions of Ukraine that are only recognized as independent states by Russia and Syria — and said the capture of the region was “a liberation day to celebrate both on Earth and in space.”</p> <p>Ever since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, NASA has gone to great lengths to try to preserve the partnership on the space station, which has endured for more than 20 years. The space agency has highlighted the comity between the astronauts and cosmonauts living side by side in orbit and pledged the partnership would continue to endure.</p> <p>Earlier this year, Kathy Lueders, NASA’s associate administrator for space operations, said that despite the war and tensions on the ground, NASA and its Russian counterparts “are still talking together. We’re still doing training together. We’re still working together. Obviously, we understand the global situation and where it is, but as a joint team, these teams are operating together.”</p> <p>She added that, “obviously we need to continue to monitor the situation. ... We've operated in these kinds of situations before and both sides always operated very professionally and understand the importance of this fantastic mission and continuing to have peaceful relations between the two countries in space.”</p> <p>Last year, after Russia blew up a dead satellite that scattered debris and threatened the station, Bill Nelson, the NASA administrator, strongly condemned the Russian military, calling it “reckless and dangerous.” Still, he had gone out of his way to highlight the space station as a peaceful haven and maintain that the war has not thrown the partnership into question.</p> <p>“The cosmonauts and the astronauts are getting along as usual,” he told CNBC in March.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 CDC guidelines: 7 counties should mask up
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/7-wa-counties-should-mask-up-cdc-recommends/
GIST	<p>People in seven Washington counties should wear masks indoors and on public transportation, according to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>These counties include Grays Harbor, Thurston, Clark, Grant, Adams, Spokane and Walla Walla.</p> <p>The CDC’s most recent COVID-19 community levels were calculated Thursday using data from June 30-July 6. The number of Washington counties classified as high risk decreased this week; 15 counties were classified as high risk on June 30.</p> <p>Community levels are calculated based on COVID-19 cases per capita and the percent of inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, according to the CDC.</p> <p>“Cases overall seem to be flattening at this stage, though it is difficult to determine if these short-term trends are more representative of testing rates versus actual infections,” said Emily Fredenberg, a spokesperson with the Washington State Department of Health.</p>

	<p>The BA.4 and BA.5 omicron subvariants are both increasing in Washington, with BA.5 representing 35% of cases from June 19-June 25, Fredenberg said.</p> <p>COVID-19 data reported on the state level likely only represents 10% of infections in Washington due to many residents self-testing at home, Fredenberg added.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Report: quake-triggered tsunami to Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/earthquake-would-trigger-20-foot-tsunami-in-seattle-within-3-minutes-state-report/
GIST	<p>A tsunami triggered by a major earthquake beneath Puget Sound would arrive at our shores sooner and reach farther inland than previously understood, according to a study published Thursday by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.</p> <p>Models showed a tsunami following a magnitude 7.5 quake would inundate Seattle’s shoreline under more than 20 feet of water, and reach parts of Bainbridge Island, Elliott Bay and Alki Point within 3 minutes.</p> <p>Waves could reach a staggering 42 feet at the Seattle Great Wheel and reach as far as Lumen Field and T-Mobile Park.</p> <p>“Three to five minutes is all that separates a seismic event from the arrival of tsunami waves,” said Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz on Thursday during a news conference on the Seattle waterfront. “Which is why we do this research now so everyone is aware of it, so our local state government is aware of it, and we can start to prepare and plan and take all precautions necessary.”</p> <p>The new study used newer data on topography and elevation, spanning a larger area, than did previous studies of the Seattle, Tacoma and Everett areas published in 2003, 2009 and 2014 respectively.</p> <p>While Tacoma is projected to see less water inundation than in previous studies, the new report said waves could travel farther inland.</p> <p>Water along parts of the northeast coast of Harbor Island could rise 15 feet, the study showed, while waves could reach up to half a mile inland from Smith Cove to Sodo, and closer to a mile near the Port of Tacoma.</p> <p>North of Deception Pass, the waves grow smaller, to a projected average height of 5 feet.</p> <p>Franz urged residents to learn more about the risks facing their area, sign up for earthquake and tsunami warnings, and to prepare an emergency kit with at least two weeks of water, food and other necessities — and to do all of that now, before it’s too late.</p> <p>“We will not be able to design away all of the risks stemming from earthquakes and tsunamis, but we can take this new modeling to help us develop plans ensuring our resiliency when it happens,” she said.</p> <p>In the study, researchers from the department’s Washington Geological Survey division used projections modeled after the last major earthquake under the Seattle fault — a magnitude 7.5 that occurred about 1,100 years ago — to estimate the height, arrival time and inland reach of a subsequent tsunami if, or when, the disaster repeats itself.</p> <p>Research shows the fault has triggered smaller quakes, mostly around 6.5 magnitude, five times in the past 3,500 years.</p> <p>The quake that happened 1,100 years ago was likely the biggest in the past 16,000 years.</p>

	While it's likely future earthquakes will be smaller than what was modeled, the projections were still "shocking," said Alex Dolcimascolo of the Geological Survey division, an author of the report. "We really wanted to emphasize this scenario so people can prepare."
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HEADLINE	07/07 WA renames San Juan Islands waterway
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/wa-renames-san-juan-islands-waterway-to-honor-indigenous-leader/
GIST	<p>A waterway in the San Juan Islands has officially been renamed to honor one of Washington's first Indigenous elected officials.</p> <p>The little-known strait of water — about a half-mile wide and 2 miles long between Orcas and Shaw islands — is now named Cayou Channel.</p> <p>Previously, the channel was named Harney Channel, after Gen. William Harney, who almost started the "Pig War" and was also responsible for the slaying of Indigenous people and an enslaved woman.</p> <p>Now, the channel honors Henry Cayou, who was an Orcas Island county commissioner for 29 years. Cayou was a commercial fisherman and lived his entire life on Orcas Island, from 1869 to 1959.</p> <p>While the name change is officially part of the Washington Administrative Code, the federal U.S. Board on Geographic Names will also review the change, said Washington State Department of Natural Resources spokesperson Kenny Ocker.</p> <p>Orcas Island resident Ken Carrasco and Shaw Island resident Stephanie Buffum spearheaded the effort to rename the channel. An online petition in support of the name change has garnered over 1,100 signatures.</p> <p>Sara Palmer, a member of the Committee on Geographic Names, described the change as "our big ticket item" in a presentation to the Board of Natural Resources. "There's a tremendous popular support. That's one people are pretty excited about."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Shortage of care keeps women forgo jobs
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/business/economy/women-labor-caregiving.html
GIST	<p>A dearth of child care and elder care choices is causing many women to reorganize their working lives and prompting some to forgo jobs altogether, hurting the economy at a moment when companies are desperate to hire, and forcing trade-offs that could impair careers.</p> <p>Care workers have left the industry in large numbers amid the pandemic, shrinking the number of nursery and nursing home employees by hundreds of thousands. At the same time, coronavirus outbreaks have led to intermittent school shutdowns, which, in turn, have made care demands less predictable and increased the need for reliable backup options.</p> <p>Although plenty of men have also taken on increased care duties since the pandemic began, women perform most caregiving in America, according to the Labor Department. They have made a surprising return to the labor market despite that challenge.</p> <p>Federal data shows that the share of women participating in the labor market by working, or by looking for jobs, remains depressed relative to 2019, but it has recovered roughly as much as the share for men has. Mothers still work less than other women, but the gap between the two has narrowed to about the level that prevailed before the pandemic, an analysis by the Federal Reserve found.</p> <p>Yet those signs of a comeback hide strains beneath the surface. A deeper dive into the Labor Department's monthly survey of households shows that unmarried women without college degrees who have young</p>

children have returned to work more slowly than others, a sign that the shortage of care is making them particularly vulnerable.

Self-employment has also surged among mothers, suggesting that many women are finding ways to make work more flexible as they scramble to balance care responsibilities with their need to earn money. Other women talk about putting in fewer hours and juggling increased workloads.

In February, about 39% of women with children younger than 5 told Stanford University's RAPID Survey that they had quit their jobs or reduced their hours since the pandemic began, up from 33% at the same time last year. More than 90% of those women said they did so of their own accord, not because they were laid off or had their hours cut. Last year, that number was 65%.

Those forced to cut back on work could face lasting disadvantages. They are missing out on an unusual moment of worker power, in which many employees are bargaining for higher wages or switching to more lucrative jobs. Right now, the fields where women are most concentrated — including service sector jobs in hospitality and health care — have some of the most openings and the most rapid pay growth.

"I think it will be really interesting to see what the long-term consequences are on mothers' career opportunities," said Ariane Hegewisch, program director in employment and earnings at the Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Women have continued to work, but they clearly had to cut back."

America's long-running caregiving shortage, for children and older adults, was compounded by the pandemic.

The professional caregiving workforce — also disproportionately female — hasn't recovered. More than 1 child care worker in 10 hasn't returned, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (although that data may not capture all the single-employee, home-based operators who make up a huge part of the sector). The number of nursing home workers remains 11.5% below its level in February 2020. Together, the two categories represent a loss of 500,000 jobs.

"For women, that's the double whammy. Most of those workers are women, and most of the people who need those supports to enter the workforce themselves are women," said Katherine Gallagher Robbins, a senior fellow with the National Partnership for Women & Families.

At the same time, there is new demand for care. After a decrease in the number of births early in the pandemic, nearly 3.7 million people were born last year, up 1% from 2020 and the first such increase since 2014.

Christy Charny, a college administrative assistant in Fort Collins, Colorado, recently talked to her manager about dialing back her hours from full time to part time. She likes her job and needs it for the health insurance it provides, but her 12-week-old daughter was having trouble nursing, and paying for full-time infant care was a nonstarter for her and her husband.

"There is no way that we can afford \$1,500 a month for child care on our full-time salaries," said Charny, 32. "We would go into debt just so that I could work full time."

For a while, she was struggling to find any child care at all. She couldn't afford full-time help, and the day care center where she had put down a deposit wouldn't give her a discount if she used it only part time. She was frantically looking for other options when good news arrived: The most affordable nursery in her area, where she had been on the waiting list since October 2021, had a part-time opening.

The days — Tuesday, Thursday and Friday — were not exactly right for her professional schedule, but the place was just \$246 per week, so she was going to try it.

"I know we can make it work if we're careful and we cut back on other expenses," she said. Charny's husband sells shoes at REI, and together they make about \$60,000 before taxes.

Economists have long identified a lack of available and affordable child care as a reason that American women do not work more, sometimes by comparing the United States with Canada — which is economically similar in many ways but has more generous child care and parental leave policies and a higher rate of female employment. The same is true for parts of Europe.

“Until 1995, the U.S. was the world’s leader in terms of female labor force participation,” said Claudia Goldin, an economist at Harvard University. “Now, this host of countries that we used to think were backward in terms of gender norms have exceeded the U.S.”

And it is no surprise that the burden of care without professional help falls on workers with less education, who tend to earn less.

There is a “financial trade-off between work and child care” that hinges on “what share of your income that child care eats up,” said Sarah House, an economist at Wells Fargo. “It’s a much smaller share if you’re a working professional with a six-figure salary than if you are working a restaurant job and barely clearing \$30,000.”

Stanford’s RAPID Survey also showed that most mothers who cut back on work did so even though they didn’t have adequate income without it. And for those staying on the job, volatility in the child care industry can add considerable stress.

“If you were hanging on to an official home-based provider to take your kid so you could go to your work, and that person closed their doors, you probably couldn’t afford to stop working,” said the survey’s director, Philip Fisher. “So you’d have to rely on anything you could pull together.”

As some mothers pull back, there are implications for the economy. Employers are missing a key source of labor at a time when they have nearly two job openings for every unemployed person.

Washington has tried to offset the problem to allow more parents to return to work. The American Rescue Plan, enacted last year, supplied \$39 billion to help child care providers stay open, and probably prevented even larger reductions in care. Some states have supplemented that money, while others have relaxed licensing requirements and allowed a bigger ratio of children to care providers.

The White House’s Build Back Better legislation included \$400 billion for child care and prekindergarten, and a recent study by a team of economists estimated a similar plan could raise the rate at which mothers are employed by 6 percentage points. But the legislation foundered as concerns about spending mounted.

Finding care for older adults also grew more difficult after COVID-19 ripped through nursing homes and sent nurses fleeing the bedside.

Because of its dedicated federal funding stream, the elder care industry is larger and more formalized than the child care sector. But its workforce is similarly low paid, and has gone through a harrowing time during the pandemic.

According to a recent survey conducted by the American Health Care Association, a nursing home trade group, wages for nurses have increased 28% to 34% since the pandemic began. But only about 5% of the nurses who left have returned to such institutionalized settings, according to federal data. Among the challenges for such centers is the tight labor market.

Dorinda MacDougald is one of those who have stuck it out. She has been a clinical nursing assistant at Ellicott Center in Buffalo, New York, for 25 years and makes about \$18 an hour.

“I stay there for the residents, because they deserve quality care,” she said. But not everyone makes the same choice: One of MacDougald’s colleagues recently left to work at a Red Lobster. “You’d have to compete with the area,” MacDougald said. “Everybody else is paying \$16, \$17, \$18.”

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that about 31% of nursing homes are reporting staffing shortages, which can prevent them from taking in more residents.

Part of that reflects a shift toward home-based care, which workers and patients have found safer and otherwise more appealing. Nursing home workers have also left for staffing agencies and hospitals, which offer better pay and more opportunities for advancement.

Among the states reporting the most widespread staffing shortages is Minnesota, where 69% of nursing homes say they don't have enough caregivers. That state has a higher-than-average share of nonprofit facilities that depend on Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements, which the industry says have not been adjusted for the increased cost of operations.

That's where Staci Drouillard, 54, has been trying to find a place for her parents.

She lives in Grand Marais, Minnesota, on Lake Superior, two hours northeast of Duluth. Her father, who is 87 years old and a lifelong resident of the town, has dementia. Her mother, 83, cared for him until she had a series of strokes.

Both parents worked, but they weren't able to build enough savings to afford home-based care, even if a local aide were available. The county's only nursing home has 37 beds, but six are empty because of staff vacancies, according to the facility's CEO.

Now, the task falls to Drouillard, who goes to her parents' house most days. After getting a promotion at the radio station where she works, she shifted to a position that is home-based, with fewer hours, lower pay and less authority, as caregiving consumed more and more of her time.

"As I watched my parents' health deteriorate and decline, I realized I needed to pivot to a job that has less responsibility," Drouillard said. "Their care is kind of like having another job, except you don't really know what hours you're going to work."

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HEADLINE	07/07 Got Covid? Caution against working thru it
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/busgot-covid-doctors-caution-against-powering-through-it-even-from-home/
GIST	<p>More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, when Dr. Anthony Fauci tested positive for the coronavirus, his federal agency announced that he would "continue to work from his home."</p> <p>So did U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, who announced on Twitter that after testing positive, "I plan to work remotely." And so did San Francisco Mayor London Breed, whose office announced she would conduct meetings from home after testing positive.</p> <p>As vaccines and new treatments have eased some of the alarm around a COVID-19 diagnosis, continuing to work — but from home — has become a familiar practice among professionals who can do their jobs remotely. Fauci was vaccinated and boosted and said he was experiencing mild symptoms, like other officials who said they would stay on the job from home.</p> <p>Physicians caution, however, that rest is an important part of weathering a COVID-19 infection. Plugging away from home is better than putting others at risk of getting infected, but it can still strain the immune system, worsening the toll of a COVID infection, experts say.</p> <p>"Sleep equals immunity," said Dr. Susan Cheng, a cardiologist, researcher and professor in the Smidt Heart Institute at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. As it fights off the virus, "you want to have your immune system not distracted by anything else," including stress from work.</p>

People forget that COVID-19 is not the common cold, she said — and even for a common cold, “you do not want to be going 100% or even 80%.” Cheng pointed to studies done long before the pandemic, which found that mice infected with “garden variety viruses” fared much worse if they were forced to swim.

“You really want your body to recover,” Cheng said. “Give it as much rest as possible, to recover as fully as possible.”

Family medicine specialist Dr. Caitlin McAuley said that “in any acute illness — and COVID especially — we know that rest is important.”

“Getting adequate sleep lets the immune system rebalance,” along with hormones, said McAuley, who sees patients through the COVID Recovery Clinic at Keck Medicine of USC. In addition, “we often don’t acknowledge the fact that when we’re sick, we’re not functioning appropriately mentally as well. So decision making may be impaired.”

“At a minimum, you really should unplug for three to five days,” McAuley said.

The public messages from prominent officials saying they’ll keep working from home are “minimizing the risk of long COVID and encouraging others to think, ‘If I have the virus, I can just push through it,’ ” said David Putrino, director of rehabilitation innovation for the Mount Sinai Health System.

Long COVID occurs when symptoms persist for months or longer beyond an initial infection. So far, data tracking rest and COVID outcomes are sparse, “but point us towards the idea that individuals who did not adequately rest had a higher incidence of persistent symptoms,” Putrino said.

The pressure to keep working with COVID — even if it’s from home — has also troubled labor and disability advocates who see it as normalizing working through illness.

When prominent officials test positive and say they will keep working from home, “it is a way of saying, ‘I am still a powerful person who is able to continue doing my job,’ ” said Jaime Seltzer, director of scientific and medical outreach at #MEAAction, the Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Action Network. If the goal was to craft a public message based on the best evidence, “we would say that when you become ill, you should be resting.”

Healthy people are used to being able to push through fatigue, rest for the night, “and wake up more or less feeling back to normal,” Seltzer said. “But we have to recognize that when your immune system is being challenged ... that’s simply not true anymore. And we shouldn’t expect ill bodies to behave like healthy bodies.”

It can also be challenging to get people to understand that mental exertion — like the tasks done during remote work — also uses up energy, Seltzer added.

As of January, nearly 60% of U.S. workers who said their jobs could be done largely remotely were working from home most or all of the time — 2½ times the rate as before the pandemic, according to Pew Research Center surveys. Working from home has been more common among people with college degrees and higher incomes.

“Your labor is supposed to be flexible, but that’s the underside — you don’t always really control when you labor,” said Eileen Boris, a UC Santa Barbara professor who has studied the home as a workplace. At times, “you think you’re choosing to work, but are you? It’s not like you can walk away from the office.”

Although the rise of remote work has blurred the lines between work and home life, prodding some employees to keep sending emails or holding Zoom meetings while sick, the pressure to stay on the job with COVID has fallen hardest on poorer workers who are less likely to have the option of working from home.

In surveys of thousands of service workers this spring, the Shift Project at the Harvard Kennedy School found that among workers who reported becoming sick — with any illness — two thirds of them said they had worked while ill.

Sick leave is not guaranteed for many hourly workers, and taking even a day off can be an economic blow to their households, said Daniel Schneider, co-director of the Shift Project and a professor of public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. In the surveys, many workers said that “I was afraid I’d get in trouble for calling out sick.”

Other common responses were that a supervisor had pressured them to work, that they couldn’t get someone else to cover their shift, and that “I didn’t want to let my co-workers down,” Schneider recounted. “That’s the internalization of a sense that, ‘I should work sick.’ But it is a product of a set of corporate decisions to only have just a few people on the floor.”

As of February, roughly a tenth of workers surveyed said they had gone to work with COVID-19 symptoms or after being exposed to the virus because they couldn’t afford to take time off, Kaiser Family Foundation surveys found. Working through COVID symptoms or exposure was much more common — 29% said they had done so — among workers with household incomes under \$40,000. Only 6% of workers from households with higher incomes said the same, the surveys showed.

The California Department of Public Health generally recommends that someone who tests positive or has COVID symptoms isolate themselves from others for at least five days, then take an antigen test. Under the guidelines, they should continue to isolate another five days if they test positive or still have symptoms.

If someone still has a fever, even after 10 days, they are supposed to keep isolating until it is gone at least 24 hours, under the state recommendations. California officials also recommend that people continue to wear a mask around others for 10 full days after their symptoms began or they got a positive test result.

McAuley, who sees patients with long COVID, said that she has had some patients “who essentially never really stopped working.” At Keck Medicine’s COVID Recovery Clinic, “we have a lot of patients who have very ‘Type A’ personalities,” McAuley said, “and we do frequently see it’s difficult to have them allow themselves to rest.”

“To even take a week or two to sleep, when they need to sleep, and just be off of work ... for some people that is really a key factor in them recovering,” McAuley said.

As a general rule, “you should be slightly more cautious than you think you have to be,” said Seltzer of #MEAction. She recommended that people learn about “pacing,” a strategy to manage activity that she described as “being active when you’re able and resting when you’re tired — which is harder than it sounds.”

Pacing can include breaking up activities into manageable chunks to avoid too much exertion. Putrino, of Mount Sinai, argued that “pacing is a technique that should be applied to acute phases of COVID infection as much as it should be applied in long COVID.”

“It’s not just, ‘Hey, don’t exert yourself and don’t push too hard’ — it’s an actual strategy that you can learn about how to plan your day,” including setting aside times throughout the day for rest, Putrino said.

Dr. Timothy Brewer, a UCLA professor of medicine and epidemiology, urged patients to pay attention to the signals from their bodies, even if an infection initially seems mild. With COVID-19, “people can do well for about 10 to 12 days and then get very sick,” Brewer said. “Just because you did well in the first week doesn’t mean you’re necessarily going to do well in the second or third week.”

In general, “your body is pretty good at telling you what it needs,” Brewer said. “So if you’re feeling tired and you’re sick with COVID, that’s probably your body saying, ‘Get back in bed.’”

HEADLINE	07/07 Monkeypox spreading Oregon, Washington
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/monkeypox-spreading-within-oregon-and-washington/
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. — Health officials in Oregon said Thursday they have confirmed six cases of monkeypox in the state.</p> <p>The cases — all affecting men — include one in Multnomah County, three in Lane County and two in Washington County, the Oregon Health Authority said in a statement. There have been no deaths.</p> <p>Globally, nationally and in Oregon, cases were initially associated with travel but more recent cases do not have a history of travel, indicating transmission within the U.S. and Oregon, officials said. The same trend was seen in Washington state this week, which reported nine cases in King County .</p> <p>One of the nine King County residents infected was hospitalized but has since been released, Public Health — Seattle & King County spokesperson Sharon Bogan said in an email.</p> <p>Dr. Tim Menza, OHA senior health adviser for monkeypox response, said while anyone can be infected, the current global outbreak has largely affected men who have sex with men.</p> <p>“Right now our priority should be empowering men who have sex with men and the larger LGBTQIA+ and queer community and their health care providers with information, testing, prevention and treatment strategies,” he said.</p> <p>Oregon’s supply of vaccines is limited but federal allocations to OHA have been arriving in recent days and are expected to increase. Menza said he hopes to expand vaccine availability to beyond just those who have been exposed to the virus.</p> <p>In King County, health officials are expecting about 500 vaccine doses from the Washington state Department of Health, which is distributing shots. More information about the virus and its risk factors are available at Public Health — Seattle & King County’s news website.</p> <p>Experts say anyone can be infected through close contact with a sick person, their clothing or bedsheets. Most monkeypox patients experience fever, body aches, chills and fatigue. People with more serious illness may develop a rash and lesions.</p> <p>Most people recover within about two to four weeks without needing to be hospitalized, monkeypox can be fatal for up to 6% of cases and is thought to be more severe in children.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 King Co. mental health referrals decline
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/why-king-county-mental-health-facilities-decline-27-of-referrals/
GIST	<p>A wheelchair, using a CPAP machine for sleeping, pregnancy – these are among the reasons why hundreds of people are turned away from mental health crisis facilities in the King County area every year.</p> <p>Known as evaluation and treatment centers (E&Ts), their goal is to stabilize patients in a psychiatric emergency with medication and therapy. But people with mental illness, their families and their advocates point out that despite this mission, some of the most vulnerable people often are denied treatment.</p> <p>For people with substance-use disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities or criminal records, it can be a maze to decipher which facility will offer the proper staff, training and bed availability to take them. And if no facility accepts them, some people languish in emergency rooms or are released without treatment into the community and sometimes into homelessness.</p>

Staff at these facilities say declining some people is necessary to keep themselves and patients safe: It's a delicate balance managing the needs of patients with the care that underfunded and understaffed facilities can realistically offer in a siloed mental health system that pinballs patients through it all.

E&Ts turned down about one in every three referrals for treatment in 2015, according to an Evaluation and Treatment Decline Report, the first of its kind to document why patients were turned away from King County centers. The report examined data from 2015 through 2019.

"It became apparent that some places were declining people for reasons that were frankly upsetting," said psychiatrist Maria Yang, the former medical director for King County's Behavioral Health and Recovery Division, who authored the report.

Decline rates lessened over the next few years and centers admitted more patients, but the COVID-19 pandemic stifled improvements. According to the newest data from county officials from December 2021, the decline rate across all facilities was at 27% – with 1,227 declines last year alone in King County.

County officials point out that while an individual may be declined from one facility, they may be accepted on the next referral or several days later when a bed opens – it's a complicated lottery draw.

The most declines last year occurred at Fairfax Behavioral Health in Kirkland, with 314 declines total. Recovery Place in Kent, however, had the highest rate of declines, turning down 41% of referrals, followed by Cascade Behavioral Health in Tukwila, which declined 36% of referrals. Cascade chose not to comment and Fairfax didn't respond to multiple requests for comment. Staff at Recovery Place cited staffing issues, among other reasons.

Though some providers cite an overall bed shortage, King County data finds that's not the main reason people are turned away. Instead, facilities cite patients' medical and behavioral issues, as well as administrative reasons. Even under the coronavirus threat, only 41 individuals were turned away in 2021 for COVID-19-related reasons.

"This data over time started telling a story," Yang said. "Certain hospitals seemed much more likely than other hospitals to not take individuals."

Finding care

Donald Bremnor found himself on Zoom in February 2021 testifying in front of Washington state legislators.

He was speaking in favor of a bill that would mandate E&Ts to accept all patients, presuming they have room and can provide care; no more cherry-picking.

Senate Bill 5397 would have meant a different future for Bremnor and his adult son who has schizophrenia. His son, a military veteran whom The Seattle Times is not naming for privacy reasons, was seeking care for a mental health crisis in 2018.

Bremnor said his son was denied care at two E&T facilities, though he never understood why. Instead they waited over 100 days at two hospitals – one in Gig Harbor, another in Lakewood – on a single bed certification, a temporary license that allows emergency rooms to hold patients involuntarily. Critics of the license say it hardly qualifies as treatment.

Bremnor's son was eventually accepted to a facility, but, due to high blood pressure and a fall, bounced between an acute care hospital and an E&T facility in Lakewood, though the hospital medically cleared him each time.

For Bremnor and his family it was devastating.

“Seeing all of this happen, I wondered how – in the procedure where the promise of treatment justifies legal detention – a provider of that treatment had the discretion to refuse him,” he shared.

In the King County area, E&Ts turned away about half of all referrals over the past two years due to medical reasons. Examples include dementia, CPAP machines, substance use, autism or a developmental disability, pregnancy, or a person with COVID-19. Staff say it’s hard to care for these patients with their limited resources, and in some cases canes or oxygen tanks can pose a safety risk for patients and workers.

Administrative issues contribute to declines a quarter of the time. That can include short-staffing or “acuity on the unit,” meaning that staff are already focusing on people requiring higher levels of care and can’t take on additional people with high needs.

Reasons for decline also include people who are transgender and may need an individual room (most facilities house two or three people to a room), though some advocates have critiqued the policy as discriminatory. If an incoming patient has a history of violence or is a registered sex offender, they can also be administratively declined by a facility.

Behavioral declines can include someone coming into the facility in restraints, people who are currently violent, and anyone considered too acute or sick.

Finally, not having enough beds resulted in 7% of declines in 2021, and 1% of declines occurred for unknown reasons. In their latest report, county officials note that criteria for declines vary across facilities, and the facilities may not always apply their criteria consistently.

A separate [report](#) by the Washington State Hospital Association also found high rates of decline across the state, with 7,600 declines in a four-month period in 2021. Half of the providers cited “No beds available” as their reason. Another 17% of declines were due to “complex behaviors,” while 12% were for medical reasons.

Altogether the data paints a grim picture for people in crisis with dozens of barriers that stack up along the way, sometimes disenfranchising the very individuals who would most benefit from care.

“This system is so broken and impossible to navigate. It’s so ineffective and people aren’t getting help,” said Caitlin Sellhorn, a former Seattle-area psychiatric nurse of six years. Sellhorn recently moved to Portland, Maine, but spent time working in both inpatient and outpatient centers in the region, including Navos, UW and Harborview.

One challenge she saw during her time is that for-profit hospitals run lean businesses – and even the nonprofit models have to balance their services in order to stay afloat.

“The hospitals don’t want to keep them [patients] if they’re gonna have to eat the bill,” she said.

According to the Washington State Health Care Authority, [fully funding](#) treatment is tricky at freestanding E&Ts (those not connected to a traditional medical hospital), and few private insurances cover the care, though recently passed [legislation](#) addresses that.

To complicate matters, hospitals also have to think through liability issues – that’s why people in crisis are initially medically cleared in emergency rooms, despite everyone agreeing ERs are costly and sometimes the worst place for a person who’s already stressed and overwhelmed. Staff and beds are also limited after years of underfunding mental and behavioral health services. And even when freestanding E&Ts take patients with higher needs, it’s sometimes harder to discharge them to appropriate housing, creating a cascading backlog.

“We can only admit and care for as many patients as we can staff for,” said Richard Geiger, the chief of inpatient and residential services at Valley Cities, which oversees Recovery Place, a facility that serves people with mental health crises and substance-use disorders.

Geiger said the facility does its best to accept people with some medical conditions, like pregnant patients or those who use CPAP machines, but people with more complex backgrounds are accepted on a “case-by-case basis.” He adds that while some facilities can handle medical needs or more acute patients, Recovery Place doesn’t have that capacity.

Dr. Mark Snowden, chief of psychiatry at Harborview, explains that hospital-based E&Ts have physicians, nurse practitioners and physician’s assistants who are trained in both behavioral health and medical services and can respond rapidly to either need, leading to better acceptance rates at hospitals like Harborview and Swedish.

“I can’t say that there is no cherry-picking. But I think it’s more complicated than that,” he said.

Snowden shared that more and more patients coming in with psychiatric needs also have untreated chronic medical conditions like diabetes, heart disease and lung disease. Those medical needs don’t disappear when a patient is experiencing a mental health crisis, but Snowden urged other hospitals to take a broad view on what kinds of patients they can manage in order to help freestanding E&Ts that don’t have that option.

“You don’t have to avoid the patients that you might fear [have] all these potentially horrible outcomes,” Snowden said.

Attempting change

To address the high rates of declines, King County has a patient placement committee that meets monthly. Staff from various hospitals come together to find beds for hard-to-place individuals.

“We can work with each hospital individually, but as you can see from the data, it’s really going to take the entire system to agree this is a priority,” said Kelli Nomura, director of the King County Behavioral Health and Recovery Division.

Washington State Senator Emily Randall (D-Bremerton) tried to tackle this problem at the state level by sponsoring a bill mandating evaluation and treatment centers and detox facilities to take all patients and provide adequate treatment. Bremnor, whose son struggled to find a bed, was part of the reason Randall took up the cause.

That bill, however, never made it out of committee. The Washington State Hospital Association and medical staff pushed back, stating they were too understaffed and could not keep patients or themselves safe. The bill was well-intentioned but the wrong approach, they said.

Randall, who is running for reelection, said she plans to make a similar attempt in the next legislative session, though she’s not sure yet how it will look.

“No one is moving fast enough,” she said.

And while she understands hospitals’ concerns, she responds with a story about a ride-along she took with the Kitsap County Sheriff last month. One officer was from Arizona, one of the states with the [best crisis mental health services in the country](#).

“One of the things that he said was that when he was in Arizona, there was always a crisis facility to take someone to,” said Randall. “Here, his options are an ER or jail.”

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HEADLINE	07/08 FBI delay, incomplete background checks
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fbi-gun-background-checks-delayed-rcna36391

There were over 1 million opportunities for someone to buy a gun from a licensed dealer without a completed background check in 2020 and 2021, according to [an FBI report](#) released last month.

In all, 1,002,274 background checks — or 4.2 percent — took longer than three business days in 2020 and 2021, a higher share than any other period since at least 2014, according to data compiled by NBC News. After the third business day, federal law allows dealers to sell weapons while the background check is still pending, which potentially puts weapons in the hands of people who can't legally own a gun because of mental illness or their criminal history.

The FBI ultimately completed about one-fourth of those delayed background checks and discovered that 11,564 people were able to buy guns in 2020 and 2021 before the check showed that they should not have been allowed to do so, according to the FBI report. Agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives then had to retrieve the weapons.

But that number only accounts for a fraction of the delayed background checks. The FBI never completed 734,604 checks from January 2020 through November 2021, the most recent data available, because they took longer than 88 days — after which the bureau must stop its research and purge the unfinished checks from its system.

Some dealers choose not to sell weapons without a completed check, and [many states](#) also have more stringent requirements.

Still, it's impossible to know how many people who bought guns after an unfinished background check would have been denied had it been completed.

"Every gun sold without a completed background check poses a potential risk," said Rob Wilcox, federal legal director for the gun control advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety. "And these staggering numbers show that we have a serious problem."

Last month, after a mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, Congress [extended the deadline to complete a background check](#) to 10 business days for gun buyers under 21. That gives the FBI more time to block a sale to someone who shouldn't have a weapon. But the new law also requires a more extensive background check for gun buyers under 21, meaning that officials will have more time but also more to do.

The new law doesn't change the tight three-day deadline for gun buyers 21 and over.

That deadline, which gun control advocates call the "Charleston loophole," is how a white supremacist bought the gun he used to kill nine Black worshipers at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. The shooter had admitted to drug possession during a prior arrest, which made it illegal for him to buy or own a gun. But his background check was not completed after three days, so he was allowed to buy a gun on the fourth day.

The Rev. Sharon Risher lost her mother, Ethel Lee Lance, 70, in the Charleston attack. Seven years later, she supports the new federal law, but she's frustrated that it doesn't do more to address gun violence — including closing the Charleston loophole.

"I will take the crumb. It's something," she said. "But this crumb they're offering does nothing to dent so many laws we need."

The National Rifle Association opposed extending the timeline for people under 21, [raising concerns](#) that the new law "would be interpreted in a manner to prevent the lawful exercise of the Second Amendment right." The three-business-day window is necessary to make sure the government doesn't "arbitrarily deny a law-abiding individual's Second Amendment rights" through bureaucratic delays, the NRA said. The NRA did not respond to a request for comment.

	<p>The FBI's data on background checks is an undercount. It only includes checks processed by the bureau; 19 states run some or all background checks themselves. It also does not cover December 2021, because the FBI finalized the report before those numbers were available.</p> <p>The FBI said in a statement that it is "unable to speculate on the factors that cause an increase or decrease in unresolved transactions."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 European air travel chaos
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/air-travel-europe-cancellations-delays-staffing-shortages/
GIST	<p>Overcrowded terminals. Delayed and canceled flights. Thousands of bags piled in airports. Travelers might be surprised to hear that air travel in Europe is a bigger mess than in the States.</p> <p>The operational reliability of European airlines has dropped significantly since 2021. And the flights that are operating face continued delays and cancellations — especially for short-haul intra-European flights. The airlines are focusing their operations on long-haul intercontinental flights, which means travelers in New York flying nonstop to Paris have a halfway decent shot of completing the flight somewhat near to its published schedule. But those connecting in Paris to another European destination could have problems.</p> <p>And those delayed and canceled flights have stranded thousands of passengers, who have filled up terminals as they wait for a way to get where they're going. Plus, there are more than a million fewer ground handlers, customer service agents, gate agents and baggage loaders in Europe than before the pandemic, meaning long wait times for passengers at either end of their journey.</p> <p>To cope with airport overcrowding, some countries have put limits on the number of people allowed in a terminal at any one time — leading to lines that stretch to the streets leading to the airports. At Dublin Airport in Ireland, the line starts forming at 2 a.m. and by 3 a.m., travelers are in the streets outside the terminal, in some cases waiting three hours just to get to an airline counter or go through security.</p> <p>Then, flights are further delayed because of a shortage of workers "under the wings"-- ground handlers and baggage loaders. At London's Gatwick Airport, 1,000 flights have been taken off the schedule starting last week. And just this week, British Airways canceled 10,000 flights that were set for the summer. That brings the total flights the airline has taken off the schedule in the last few weeks to 30,000.</p> <p>Travelers are experiencing similar problems at Frankfurt Airport, and not just with flight delays. Thousands of passenger bags are piled up in claim areas — and going nowhere, a combination of missed connections and not enough baggage handlers or airline employees to identify the bags and start the process of reuniting them with their owners.</p> <p>The worst example: Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport. About 10 days ago, the government tried to limit the number of people who could be inside the terminal at any one time. Then, the government asked airlines to cut their flight schedules. Neither solved the problem.</p> <p>Now, the government of the Netherlands has taken the extraordinary — and unprecedented — step of ordering all airlines not to sell any more tickets between now and July 31. Translation: Airlines can only fly the passengers who bought tickets prior to today. And the cap doesn't lift until Aug. 1.</p> <p>This delay and cancellation mess will most likely continue through October, since airline schedules won't stabilize until demand eases in the fourth quarter, and the hiring pipeline starts to flow again. Until then, try picking a U.S. airline for outbound trips to Europe, and a foreign carrier based in that country for a return trip. That way, you're not waiting for an arriving aircraft so you can depart. And make sure any connection time is at least four hours — not just to protect you, but to make sure your bags connect.</p> <p>Or, better still, don't fly at all between European cities. Take the train. European trains are much more efficient and have a great on-time performance record.</p>

	<p>If you do end up caught in a cancellation or delay, there's one aspect of the European flight experience that remains mostly unknown to American travelers that might make things a bit easier. The EU has a relatively robust compensation system for passengers whose flights are delayed or canceled, called EC Rule 261.</p> <p>Under the rule, a traveler whose flight is delayed or canceled is entitled to receive up to 600 Euros, and in more extended delays or cancellation situations, a hotel room and other expenses as well. Most airlines don't volunteer this rule, and passengers need to know it exists — and it works.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 G20 Western leaders snub Russia FM
SOURCE	https://www.politico.eu/article/tension-simmer-at-g20-as-foreign-ministers-refuse-to-be-photographed-with-russias-lavrov/
GIST	<p>The absence of a picture is worth a thousand words.</p> <p>Foreign ministers of the G20 countries, who are meeting on the Indonesian island of Bali this week, did not take a customary group photo, after several Western leaders reportedly refused to be pictured with Russia's Sergey Lavrov over his country's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>According to a report by Japanese news agency Kyodo, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken initiated the boycott of the traditional family photo, and was joined by his G7 colleagues. Western diplomats also refused to go to a dinner event on Thursday evening because Lavrov was attending, Kyodo reported. Retno Marsudi, Indonesia's foreign minister, said the host nation understood and respected the decision, Reuters reported.</p> <p>There may yet be time for a family photo on Friday, however, as Lavrov plans to leave the summit early.</p> <p>The Russian foreign minister "is still holding bilateral talks, then he will speak to the press and leave," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Germany's DPA press agency. Lavrov won't attend the afternoon meetings, or an official dinner on Friday night.</p> <p>In an interview with Russia's state channel Russia 24, broadcast on Friday, Lavrov appeared to confirm the Western snub.</p> <p>"In terms of meeting with me, the declaration that they won't be photographed with me — I never asked anyone to be photographed," he said. "Yesterday, there was an reception that the Indonesians organized, it was sort of an introductory reception with a concert, and they [Western leaders] didn't attend."</p> <p>Western leaders including Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock have shunned Lavrov at the Bali summit, refusing to meet with him, and the American, Canadian and European delegations walked out when Russian officials were about to speak, according to Kyodo.</p> <p>But Lavrov did hold bilateral meetings with Turkey's Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and China's Wang Yi.</p> <p>In a series of tweets on Friday, the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the meeting in Indonesia is taking place during a particularly "grave context following Russia's appalling war against Ukraine." He added: "In the face of aggression, no one can be neutral."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 BA.5 most dangerous subvariant yet
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-the-new-ba5-covid-variant-is-the-most-dangerous-one-yet?ref=home
GIST	The latest subvariant of the novel coronavirus to become dominant in Europe, the United States, and other places is also, in many ways, the worst so far.

The BA.5 subvariant of the basic [Omicron variant](#) appears to be more contagious than any previous form of the virus. It's apparently better at dodging our antibodies, too—meaning it might be more likely to cause breakthrough and repeat infections.

[Vaccines and boosters](#) are still the best defense. There are even Omicron-specific booster jabs in development that, in coming months, could make the best vaccines more effective against BA.5 and its genetic cousins.

Still, BA.5's ongoing romp across half the planet is a strong reminder that the COVID pandemic isn't over. "We're not done yet, by any stretch," Eric Topol, founder and director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in California, [wrote on his Substack](#).

High levels of at least partial immunity from vaccines and past infection continue to prevent the worst outcomes—mass hospitalization and death. But globally, raw case numbers [are surging](#), with serious implications for potentially millions of people who face [a growing risk of long-term illness](#).

Equally worrying, the latest wave of infections is giving the coronavirus the time and space it needs to mutate into even more dangerous variants and subvariants. "The development of variants now is a freight train," Irwin Redlener, the founding director of Columbia University's National Center for Disaster Preparedness, told The Daily Beast.

In other words, unstoppable.

BA.5 first turned up in viral samples in South Africa in February. By May it was dominant in Europe and Israel, displacing earlier forms of the basic Omicron variant while also driving an increase in global daily COVID cases from around 477,000 a day in early June to 820,000 a day this week.

In late June, BA.5 became dominant in the United States. Cases haven't increased yet—the daily average has hovered around 100,000 since May. But that could change in coming weeks as BA.5 continues to outcompete less transmissible subvariants.

Topol offered a concise explanation for BA.5's ascendancy. Where the mutations that produced many earlier variants mostly affected the spike protein—the part of the virus that helps it to grab onto and infect our cells—BA.5 has mutations *across* its structure. "BA.5 is quite distinct and very fit, representing marked difference from all prior variants," Topol wrote.

BA.5's widespread mutations made the subvariant less recognizable to all those antibodies we've built up from vaccines, boosters and past infection. BA.5 has been able to slip past our immune systems, ninja-style, contributing to the rising rate of breakthrough cases and reinfections.

This comes as no surprise to epidemiologists who've warned for many months now that persistently high case-rates—which they largely attribute in part to a stubborn anti-vax minority in many countries—would facilitate ever more infectious and evasive variants and subvariant. The more infections, the more chances for significant mutations.

In that sense, BA5 might be a preview of the months and years to come. A year ago, we had a chance to block SARS-CoV-2's main transmission vectors through vaccines and social distancing.

But we didn't. Restrictions on businesses, schools and crowds have become politically toxic all over the world. Vaccination rates remained stubbornly low, even in many countries with easy access to jabs. In the U.S., for example, the percentage of fully vaccinated has stalled at [around 67 percent](#).

So COVID lingers, 31 months after the first case was diagnosed in Wuhan, China. The longer the virus circulates, the more variants it produces. BA.5 is the all but inevitable result of that tragic dynamic.

The situation isn't entirely hopeless. Yes, BA.5 seems to reduce the effectiveness of the best messenger-RNA vaccines. Vaccine-maker Moderna [published data](#) indicating that a booster shot it's developing specifically for Omicron and its offspring works only a third as well against BA.5 compared to earlier subvariants.

But vaccines, boosters and past infection still offer meaningful, if reduced, protection against BA.5. "Even a boost of the original genome, or a recent infection, will [produce] some cross-protective antibodies to lessen the severity of a new Omicron subvariant infection," Eric Bortz, a University of Alaska-Anchorage virologist and public-health expert, told The Daily Beast.

The more additional jabs you get on top of your prime course, the better protected you are. Arguably the best protection results from two prime jabs of the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer or Moderna plus a couple boosters. "Get your damn fourth shot!" Redlener said.

The problem, in the United States, is that only people 50 years old or older or with certain immune disorders qualify for a second booster. And the U.S. Food and Drug Administration won't say whether, or when, it might authorize second boosters for younger people. "I have nothing to share at this time," an FDA spokesperson told The Daily Beast when asked about boosters for under-50s.

It's an obvious bureaucratic screw-up. As many as a million booster doses are about to expire in the U.S., all for a want of takers. "A profound waste, which should be made available to all people, age under-50 who seek added protection," Topol wrote.

To be fair, Pfizer and Moderna are both working on new boosters that they've tailored specifically for Omicron subvariants. On June 30, an FDA advisory board endorsed these variant-specific boosters. The FDA [announced](#) it might approve them for emergency use for some Americans as early as this fall.

But there's a risk these jabs will show up too late, especially if they're highly optimized for just one recent subvariant and thus ineffective against future subvariants. "Variant-chasing is a flawed approach," Topol wrote. "By the time a BA.5 vaccine booster is potentially available, who knows what will be the predominant strain?"

Fortunately, there are fallbacks. Masks and voluntary social-distancing, of course. Post-infection therapies including the antiviral drug paxlovid also help. "This is not a time to abandon non-pharmaceutical intervention," Redlener stressed.

But voluntary mask-wearing and paxlovid are band-aids on a festering global wound. The surge in BA.5 infections creates the conditions for the *next* major subvariant—BA.6, if you will. It might be even worse. It's looking more and more likely that COVID will be with us, well, *forever*. "COVID is becoming like the flu," Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington Institute for Health, told The Daily Beast.

That is, endemic. An ever-present threat to public health. The big difference, of course, is that COVID [is much more dangerous than today's flu](#). And it keeps mutating in ways that make it even worse.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Slow pace youngest kids' vaccine doses
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/slow-pace-youngest-kids-covid-vaccine-doses-86408743
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- Nearly 300,000 children under 5 have received COVID-19 shots in the two weeks since they became available, a slower pace than for older groups. But the White House says that was expected for the eligible U.S. population of about 18 million kids.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was to publish initial data on shots for the age group later Thursday, reflecting doses administered since regulators authorized them on June 18. The first</p>

vaccinations didn't begin until several days later because the doses had to be shipped to doctors' offices and pharmacies.

U.S. officials had long predicted that the pace of vaccinating the youngest kids would be slower than for older groups. They expect most shots to take place at pediatricians' offices.

Many parents may be more comfortable getting the vaccine for their kids at their regular doctors, White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha told The Associated Press last month. He predicted the pace of vaccination would be far slower than it was for older populations.

"We're going to see vaccinations ramp up over weeks and even potentially over a couple of months," Jha said.

Officials also note there is some hesitance about the need for shots for kids who are far less likely than older age groups to develop serious illness or die from the coronavirus. Parents are being encouraged to talk to the child's doctor for trusted information about the benefits of the vaccines.

A Kaiser Family Foundation survey conducted in April found that 1 in 5 parents of children under age 5 said they would get their child vaccinated right away once it was authorized, 38% said they would wait and see, and nearly 4 in 10 said they wouldn't get their children vaccinated at all or only if required.

More than 5 million pediatric doses have been shipped to more than 15,000 locations, the White House said, ready for parents and kids to come in.

Still, the roll-out hasn't been without hiccups for some parents of babies and toddlers, because of state restrictions on pharmacies and because some doctors are not offering the shots.

Many states bar pharmacies from vaccinating children under 3 years old or require prescriptions for them to do so. In other cases, pharmacies have inadequate staff, space or training to give the shots correctly to the youngest, said Allie Jo Shipman, director of state policy for the National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations.

"It's just a more complex situation than it is with your older children and adults," Shipman said.

Some doctors opted not to offer the shots because of cold storage requirements or concern about wasting doses. The vaccine comes in multi-dose vials that must be used within 12 hours after opening.

"They don't want to see vaccine go unused," said West Virginia pediatrician Dr. Lisa Costello, who is working with her state's COVID-19 response task force. "You either need to find the number of people to vaccinate for that vial or discard the doses that are left over."

Organizing vaccine times after hours or clustering vaccine appointments are possible solutions doctors are trying, Costello said. And West Virginia has encouraged doctors to go ahead and open the vials even if they have only one patient to vaccinate, she said.

For older children, those 5 to 11 years old, vaccine coverage has varied widely from state to state, from a low of 11% of that age group fully vaccinated in Alabama to 63% in Vermont, according to an analysis of vaccination data through June 29 by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Of the top 10 states for vaccination coverage in the 5 to 11 age group, five are in New England. Of the bottom 10 states, nine are in the South.

The Biden administration said that while the slow pace of vaccination in the youngest group was expected, officials won't be satisfied until as many people as possible receive the protection of vaccines. Parents can use [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to search for vaccine providers by location, vaccine brand and age groups vaccinated.

HEADLINE	07/07 Beijing backs off vaccine mandate?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/beijing-appears-retract-vaccine-mandate-pushback-86426745
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan -- The Chinese capital Beijing appears to have backed off a plan to launch a vaccine mandate for entry into certain public spaces after pushback from residents.</p> <p>While not explicitly saying it had dropped the plan, a city official was quoted in state media late Thursday saying that people could enter venues with a negative virus test result and a temperature check, as has been the norm. They also said vaccinations would continue on the principle of "informed, voluntary consent."</p> <p>An unidentified official in the pandemic control office said residents of the city could enter any sort of public venue with a negative PCR test done in the last 72 hours and a temperature check, according to a short question and answer post from the official Beijing Daily, the main paper of the city government, published late Thursday night.</p> <p>The city announced Wednesday that starting next week, people had to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination before they can enter some public spaces including gyms, museums and libraries. It drew intense discussion as city residents worried how the sudden policy announcement would disrupt their lives.</p> <p>A phone call to the Beijing government's press office to confirm the policy change did not go through. The phone had been set to "do not disturb" mode according to a recorded message.</p> <p>Online and offline, some criticized the policy, worrying that it would force those who weren't vaccinated to get the shots, or lose out on access to many public spaces. The announcement was trending Thursday on the Chinese social networking service Weibo.</p> <p>The government is concerned about the remaining numbers of unvaccinated people, especially those over age 60 who are vulnerable. In April, the Beijing government announced that over 80% of people over 60 had gotten a vaccine, some 3.4 million people.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 North Macedonia's long road to EU
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explainer-north-macedonia-thorny-road-eu-86433090
GIST	<p>SKOPJE, North Macedonia -- Nightly protests in North Macedonia over the past week have left dozens injured. At the heart of the turmoil is the small Balkan country's long-running quest to join the European Union, a process that has faced one hurdle after the other.</p> <p>The most recent obstacle is a veto by EU member Bulgaria. A French proposal for a compromise to address Bulgaria's concerns has divided North Macedonia, sparking the sometimes violent protests. France's plan also met deep objections in Bulgaria and helped to bring down the government, which had accepted the compromise.</p> <p>WHAT IS THE DISPUTE ABOUT?</p> <p>North Macedonia has been an EU candidate for 17 years. The country emerged from the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and sought to forge a strong national identity. But in a region where borders and ethnicities have shifted and overlapped over centuries, it was beset by problems from the start.</p> <p>The country's chosen name, Macedonia, sparked outrage in neighboring Greece, which said the term harbored expansionist aims against its own province of the same name and was an attempt to usurp Greek history and culture. Athens held up Skopje's EU and NATO membership bids for years, until a 2019 deal was reached that included the smaller country changing its name to North Macedonia.</p> <p>But the following year, neighboring Bulgaria blocked the renamed nation's attempts to join the EU, accusing Skopje of disrespecting shared cultural and historic ties. Among Bulgaria's key demands were</p>

acknowledgment that the language of North Macedonia derived from Bulgarian, and the recognition of a Bulgarian minority.

The size of the Bulgarian community in North Macedonia is a matter of contention. Official data from the 2021 census put it at 3,504 people, or about 0.2% of the population. Bulgaria has doubted the figure, noting that about 90,000 of North Macedonia's roughly 2 million population received dual Bulgarian citizenship over the last two decades based on their family roots. About 53,000 more applications are pending.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

North Macedonia's EU bid is tied to a similar bid by neighboring Albania. Both countries see joining the 27-nation bloc as a means of securing stability and prosperity in an increasingly unstable world. The EU prospects of the Western Balkan countries gained increased attention in the wake of the bloc's efforts to bring Ukraine closer following the Russian invasion.

WHAT IS THE FRENCH PROPOSAL?

France held the rotating EU presidency between January and June and so has been deeply involved in negotiations to break the deadlock. EU leaders held a summit with Western Balkan nations last month, during the same week they made Ukraine and Moldova candidates for EU membership.

French President Emmanuel Macron hoped to present unblocking the EU bids of North Macedonia and Albania as a major success. On Thursday, the French Embassy in Skopje posted a message from Macron.

"Once again, North Macedonia has reached a crucial moment in its history. Seventeen years after receiving candidate status, a historic opportunity has opened: The choice is yours," he said.

Macron's proposal envisages concessions from both sides. The government in Skopje would commit to changing its constitution to recognize a Bulgarian minority, protect minority rights and banish hate speech.

The French leader stressed the proposal doesn't question the official existence of a Macedonian language, but he noted that, like all deals, it "rests on compromises and on a balance."

HOW WAS THE PROPOSAL RECEIVED?

The compromises in the French proposal led to rifts in both countries.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov's centrist government was toppled in a no-confidence vote on June 22. A junior governing partner quit the fragile four-party coalition, describing Petkov's willingness to lift the veto of North Macedonia as a "national betrayal." An early election could result in a stronger presence in parliament of nationalist and pro-Russia lawmakers.

The National Assembly already has approved the proposal, but legislators set additional conditions for agreeing to North Macedonia's EU membership. They included proper constitutional protection for Bulgarians living in North Macedonia, and no assumption that Bulgaria would recognize Macedonian as a separate language from Bulgarian.

In North Macedonia, both President Stevo Pendarovski and the government of Prime Minister Dimitar Kovacevsk backed the proposal as a reasonable compromise. Accepting it "will be neither a historic triumph, as one camp would call it, nor a historic failure or debacle, as those in the other camp say," Pendarovski said.

The government has stressed the proposal does not endanger national interests or identity. But the center-right main opposition party, the VMRO-DPMNE, as well as others, disagree, saying the deal favors Bulgarian demands that question North Macedonia's history, language, identity, culture and heritage.

	<p>Biljana Vankovska, a law professor at the Saint Cyril and Methodius University's Institute for Security, Defense and Peace, slammed the French proposal as bowing to “the nationalistic and chauvinistic demands of Bulgaria.”</p> <p>“It is unbelievable that a small nation was asked to give up its language, history and constitution-making powers to external powers in order to start the EU accession process,” she said.</p> <p>Political analyst Albert Musliu, head of the Association for Democratic Initiatives think tank, argued the proposal offers North Macedonia a chance to start membership talks with the EU.</p> <p>“If you ask me whether it is fair, then yes, the proposal is unfair, but international order is not based on fairness,” he said.</p> <p>WHAT’S NEXT?</p> <p>Bulgaria has accepted the French proposal, which now requires the backing of North Macedonia’s parliament. The text is now at committee level in parliament. No plenary session has been scheduled.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Putin: Russia has barely started action
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/putin-ukraine-russia-barely-started-action-86388540
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- With Russia's military action in Ukraine in its fifth month, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday warned Kyiv that it should quickly accept Moscow's terms or brace for the worst, adding ominously that Russia has barely started its action.</p> <p>Speaking at a meeting with leaders of the Kremlin-controlled parliament, Putin accused Western allies of fueling the hostilities, charging that "the West wants to fight us until the last Ukrainian.”</p> <p>“It's a tragedy for the Ukrainian people, but it looks like it's heading in that direction,” he added.</p> <p>“Everybody should know that largely speaking, we haven’t even yet started anything in earnest,” Putin said in a menacing note.</p> <p>He declared that Russia remains ready to sit down for talks to end the fighting, adding that “those who refuse to do so should know that the longer it lasts the more difficult it will be for them to make a deal with us.”</p> <p>“We are hearing that they want to defeat us on the battlefield,” Putin said. “Let them try.”</p> <p>Earlier in the conflict, the Kremlin demanded that Kyiv acknowledge Russian sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and recognize the independence of Moscow-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. Moscow also said it expected Ukraine to bow to the existing situation on the ground, a reference to other land gains it has made since Russian troops rolled into Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>After failing to capture Kyiv and other big cities in Ukraine's northeast early in the campaign, the Russian military shifted its focus to the eastern industrial heartland of Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops since 2014.</p> <p>Earlier this week, the Russian military claimed control of the Luhansk province, one of the two that make up Donbas, and is preparing to press its offensive into the second one, Donetsk.</p> <p>In the early stages of the conflict, Russia won control of the southern Kherson region and part of neighboring Zaporizhzhia. Moscow is expected eventually to try to cut Ukraine off from its Black Sea</p>

	<p>coast all the way to the Romanian border. If successful, it would deal a crushing blow to the Ukrainian economy and also create a corridor to Moldova's separatist region of Transnistria, where Russia maintains a military base.</p> <p>Putin reaffirmed his long-held claim that the West is using the conflict in Ukraine to try to isolate and weaken Russia.</p> <p>"They simply don't need such a country as Russia," Putin said. "This is why they have used terrorism, separatism and internal destructive forces in our country."</p> <p>He charged that Western sanctions against Russia have failed to achieve their goal of "sowing division and strife in our society and demoralizing our people."</p> <p>"The course of history is unstoppable, and attempts by the collective West to enforce its version of the global order are doomed to fail," Putin said.</p> <p>Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the Ukrainian president, responded on Twitter: "There is no plan by the 'collective West'" and only a Russian army entered Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 UK warship seizes Iran missiles to Yemen
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/uk-warship-seizes-advanced-iranian-missiles-bound-yemen-86358890
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- A British Royal Navy vessel seized a sophisticated shipment of Iranian missiles in the Gulf of Oman earlier this year, officials said Thursday, pointing to the interdiction as proof of Tehran's support for Yemen's Houthi rebels in the embattled country.</p> <p>The British government statement was striking in that it provided some of the strongest findings to date that Tehran is arming the Houthis against the Saudi-led military coalition with advanced weapons smuggled through the Persian Gulf.</p> <p>The U.K. Embassy in the United Arab Emirates described the seizure of surface-to-air-missiles and engines for land attack cruise missiles as "the first time a British naval warship has interdicted a vessel carrying such sophisticated weapons from Iran."</p> <p>"The U.K. will continue to work in support of an enduring peace in Yemen and is committed to international maritime security so that commercial shipping can transit safely without threat of disruption," said James Heapey, Minister for the Armed Forces.</p> <p>Iran's mission to the United Nations rejected the U.K.'s findings as "groundless," saying that Iran has "never transported weapons or military equipment to Yemen" in violation of the U.N. arms embargo and "always upheld its international obligations."</p> <p>The British government's announcement signals an escalation as Western officials have in the past shied away from public statements that definitively blame Iran for arming Yemen's Houthis with military contraband. The route of the smuggled shipments through the Arabian Sea or Gulf of Aden, however, has strongly suggested their destination.</p> <p>Despite a United Nations Security Council arms embargo on Yemen, Iran has long been suspected of transferring rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, missiles and other weaponry to the Houthis since the disastrous war began in 2015. Iran denies arming the Houthis, independent experts, Western nations and U.N. experts have traced components back to Iran.</p>

Citing a forensic analysis last month, the British navy linked the batch of rocket engines seized earlier this year to an Iranian-made cruise missile with a 1,000-kilometer range that it said the rebels have used against Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis also used the cruise missile to attack an oil facility in Abu Dhabi in January of this year, the British navy said, an assault that killed three people and threatened the key U.S. ally's reputation as a haven of stability. The U.S. military launched interceptor missiles during the attack, signaling a widening of Yemen's war.

The HMS Montrose's helicopter had been scanning for illicit goods in the Gulf of Oman on January 28 and February 25 when it spotted small vessels speeding away from the Iranian coast with "suspicious cargo on deck." A team of Royal Marines then halted and searched the boats, confiscating the weapons in international waters south of Iran.

A U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer supported the British warship's February operation. Fifth Fleet Vice Adm. Brad Cooper said the seizure reflected the Navy's "strong commitment to regional security and stability."

The Houthis seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in September 2014 and forced the internationally recognized government into exile. A Saudi-led coalition armed with U.S. weaponry and intelligence joined the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in March 2015.

Years of fighting have ground into a bloody stalemate and pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of famine. A tenuous truce that began around the holy Muslim month of Ramadan appears to be holding, although both sides have accused each other of violations.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	07/07 Hacktivists claim Iran IRGC data dump
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/gonjeshke-darande-israel-hackers-iran-steel-hacktivists/
GIST	<p>The group claiming responsibility for cyberattacks on multiple Iranian steel facilities last month posted on Thursday what it called a cache of nearly 20 gigabytes of data containing corporate documents that reveal the facilities' affiliation with Iran's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.</p> <p>In a series of tweets in both English and Persian, the group — which calls itself Gonjeshke Darande or Predatory Sparrow — said the 19.76 gigabyte cache was just the "first part" of what would be released. The group also posted an image of what appears to be the inside of a steel facility.</p> <p>CyberScoop has not independently verified the contents of the document release.</p> <p>When the group initially claimed the June 27 attack, it posted a video that appeared to show damage to equipment at the state-owned Khouzestan Steel Company, one of Iran's primary steel production facilities. Initial reports suggested the attack disrupted operations at the plant, but the company and the Iranian government denied that it had any major effect.</p> <p>In the video the group included a message that explained that the companies "are subject to international sanctions and continue their operations despite the restrictions." The attacks, the group added, were "being carried out carefully so to protect innocent individuals" and are "in response to the aggression of the Islamic Republic."</p> <p>Gonjeshke Darande is just one of several names, including Indra, the group uses. The shadowy outfit claims to be independent, but some speculation has suggested it could be the work of the Israeli</p>

[government](#), given the of access needed to carry out the attacks, the sophisticated nature of the operation and the messaging during and after the apparent hacks.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz ordered an investigation into recent media leaks that “hinted” that an Israeli military intelligence unit was responsible for the attack on the steel facilities, [the Times of Israel reported](#).

The Israeli Ministry of Defense did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The group has claimed other digital assaults on key Iranian targets, such as the [October 2021 attack](#) that hobbled Iranian state-controlled gasoline distribution and one on [August 2021](#) that hit the Iranian railway system.

In both cases, the group displayed messages — either on the gas pumps or on the displays for train schedules — with the office number of Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, which some threat intelligence [experts interpreted as trolling](#).

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HEADLINE	07/07 ‘CuteBoi’ cryptomining campaign
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/07/over-1200-npm-packages-found-involved.html
GIST	<p>Researchers have disclosed what they say could be an attempt to kick-off a new large-scale cryptocurrency mining campaign targeting the NPM JavaScript package repository.</p> <p>The malicious activity, attributed to a software supply chain threat actor dubbed CuteBoi, involves an array of 1,283 rogue modules that were published in an automated fashion from over 1,000 different user accounts.</p> <p>"This was done using automation which includes the ability to pass the NPM 2FA challenge," Israeli application security testing company Checkmarx said. "This cluster of packages seems to be a part of an attacker experimenting at this point."</p> <p>All the released packages in question are said to harbor near-identical source code from an already existing package named eazyminer that's used to mine Monero by means of utilizing unused resources on web servers.</p> <p>One notable modification entails the URL to which the mined cryptocurrency should be sent, although installing the rogue modules will not bring about a negative effect.</p> <p>"The copied code from eazyminer includes a miner functionality intended to be triggered from within another program and not as a standalone tool," researcher Aviad Gershon said. "The attacker didn't change this feature of the code and for that reason, it won't run upon installation."</p> <p>Like observed in the case of RED-LILI earlier this year, the packages are published via an automation technique that allows the threat actor to defeat two-factor authentication (2FA) protections.</p> <p>However, while the former involved setting up a custom server and using a combination of tools like Selenium and Interactsh to programmatically create an NPM user account and defeat 2FA, CuteBoi relies on a disposable email service called mail.tm.</p> <p>Specifically, it employs a REST API offered by the free platform that enables "programs to open disposable mailboxes and read the received emails sent to them with a simple API call." This allows the threat actor to circumvent 2FA when creating a flood of user accounts to publish the packages.</p>

	The findings coincide with another NPM-related widespread software supply chain attack dubbed IconBurst that's engineered to harvest sensitive data from forms embedded in downstream mobile applications and websites.
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HEADLINE	07/07 TrickBot shifts focus to target Ukraine
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/07/trickbot-malware-shifted-its-focus-on.html
GIST	<p>In what's being described as an "unprecedented" twist, the operators of the TrickBot malware have resorted to systematically targeting Ukraine since the onset of the war in late February 2022.</p> <p>The group is believed to have orchestrated at least six phishing campaigns aimed at targets that align with Russian state interests, with the emails acting as lures for delivering malicious software such as IcedID, CobaltStrike, AnchorMail, and Meterpreter.</p> <p>Tracked under the names ITG23, Gold Blackburn, and Wizard Spider, the financially motivated cybercrime gang is known for its development of the TrickBot banking trojan and was subsumed into the now-discontinued Conti ransomware cartel earlier this year.</p> <p>But merely weeks later, the actors associated with the group resurfaced with a revamped version of the AnchorDNS backdoor called AnchorMail that uses SMTPS and IMAP protocols for command-and-control communications.</p> <p>"ITG23's campaigns against Ukraine are notable due to the extent to which this activity differs from historical precedent and the fact that these campaigns appeared specifically aimed at Ukraine with some payloads that suggest a higher degree of target selection," IBM Security X-Force analyst Ole Villadsen said in a technical report.</p> <p>A noticeable shift in the campaigns involves the use of never-before-seen Microsoft Excel downloaders and the deployment of CobaltStrike, Meterpreter, and AnchorMail as first-stage payloads. The attacks are said to have commenced in mid-April 2022.</p> <p>Interestingly, the threat actor leveraged the specter of nuclear war in its email ruse to spread the AnchorMail implant, a tactic that would be repeated by the Russian nation-state group tracked as APT28 two months later to spread data-stealing malware in Ukraine.</p> <p>What's more, the Cobalt Strike sample deployed as part of a May 2022 campaign utilized a new crypter dubbed Forest to evade detection, the latter of which has also been used in conjunction with the Bumblebee malware, lending credence to theories that the loader is being operated by the TrickBot gang.</p> <p>"Ideological divisions and allegiances have increasingly become apparent within the Russian-speaking cybercriminal ecosystem this year," Villadsen noted. "These campaigns provide evidence that Ukraine is in the crosshairs of prominent Russian cybercriminal groups."</p> <p>The development comes as Ukrainian media outlets have been targeted with phishing messages containing malware-laced documents that exploit the Follina vulnerability to drop the DarkCrystal RAT on compromised systems.</p> <p>The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) has also warned of intrusions conducted by a group called UAC-0056 that involves striking state organizations with staffing-themed lures to drop Cobalt Strike Beacons on the hosts.</p> <p>The agency, last month, further pointed out the use of Royal Road RTF weaponizer by a China-based actor codenamed the Tonto Team (aka Karma Panda) to target scientific and technical enterprises and state bodies located in Russia with the Bisonal malware.</p>

	Attributing these attacks with medium confidence to the advanced persistent threat (APT) group, SentinelOne said the findings demonstrate "a continued effort" on the part of the Chinese intelligence apparatus to target a wide range of Russian-linked organizations.
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HEADLINE	07/07 Kremlin hackers breached RNC?
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/kremlin-breached-republican/
GIST	<p>State-backed Russian hackers reportedly breached the Republican National Committee (RNC) last week, although the party denies any data was stolen.</p> <p>Two people familiar with the matter told Bloomberg of the attack, which is thought to have come from APT29 (Cozy Bear), a notorious Kremlin hacking group that was blamed for the 2016 info-stealing raid on the Democratic National Committee (DNC).</p> <p>The group was also pegged for the SolarWinds campaign and separate raids targeting IP related to COVID-19 vaccine development.</p> <p>The RNC said that third-party IT services partner Synnex was breached over the July 4 holiday weekend, but no data was taken.</p> <p>"We immediately blocked all access from Synnex accounts to our cloud environment," chief of staff Richard Walters reportedly claimed.</p> <p>"Our team worked with Microsoft to conduct a review of our systems and after a thorough investigation, no RNC data was accessed. We will continue to work with Microsoft, as well as federal law enforcement officials, on this matter."</p> <p>In a brief statement, long-term Microsoft distributor Synnex said it had been conducting a thorough security review.</p> <p>"Synnex ... confirms it is aware of a few instances where outside actors have attempted to gain access, through Synnex, to customer applications within the Microsoft cloud environment," it added.</p> <p>"These actions could potentially be in connection with the recent cybersecurity attacks on managed service providers."</p> <p>Those attacks are a single ransomware campaign that hit US software firm Kaseya and its downstream customers over the same weekend. However, that attack is believed to have been carried out by financially motivated cyber-criminals rather than a state-backed entity.</p> <p>John Hultquist, VP of analysis at Mandiant Threat Intelligence, said parties are ideal targets for espionage actors looking for political, military, and economic intelligence.</p> <p>"Though these organizations have been famously involved in aggressive hack and leak campaigns, more often than not, Russian hackers and others target them to quietly gather intelligence," he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Most insider data breaches not malicious
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/most-insider-data-breaches-arent/
GIST	<p>The majority of insider data breaches are non-malicious, according to new research released today by American cybersecurity software company Code42 in partnership with Aberdeen Research.</p> <p>The report <i>Understanding Your Insider Risk and the Value of Your Intellectual Property</i> found that at least one in three (33%) reported data breaches involve someone with authorized access to the impacted data.</p>

A key finding of the report was that 78% of those insider data breaches involved unintentional data exposure or loss rather than any malice. Researchers observed employees repeatedly taking actions that put valuable company data at risk while fulfilling their day-to-day work responsibilities.

The daily average of data-exposure events by trusted insiders per user was 13 and included moving corporate files to untrusted locations via email, messaging, cloud or removable media.

While such breaches are unlikely to be caused by malice, they can still have a significant financial impact on a business. The study found the cost per year of breaches from insiders can reach up to 20% of annual revenue.

Businesses are struggling to maintain data security as most of them do not have consistent, centralized visibility over their own digital environments. Researchers found that 75% of organizations lack the tools necessary to track how much enterprise file movement their organization has and to monitor how frequently valuable files are exposed by legitimate users carrying out their daily tasks.

Another key finding of the research was that in 2020 a breach was four and a half times more likely to happen on an endpoint than on a server.

"Data stewardship has become a boardroom imperative. And while insider risk is not a new problem in security, managing it effectively in today's open and collaborative business climate with enough resources is," said Joe Payne, Code42's president and CEO.

"We know that one out of three data breaches involves an insider, though it's likely much higher. Important ideas and key IP encompass much more than just the company crown jewels. It includes the very digital and portable information like source code, customer lists and salary structures – data that when taken can leave a devastating impact on a company's competitive position and bottom line."

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HEADLINE	07/07 Scam cryptomining Android apps
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/170-scam-cryptomining-apps-charge/
GIST	<p>Security researchers have discovered over 170 Android apps that have scammed tens of thousands of cryptocurrency enthusiasts into paying for non-existent services.</p> <p>Lookout Threat Lab revealed that 25 of the fraudulent apps were even listed on the official Google Play marketplace.</p> <p>It separated them into two groups, BitScam and CloudScam, although all use similar business models and the same coding and design.</p> <p>Both families of scam apps promise the user access to cryptocurrency mining services, capitalizing on a recent spike in the valuation of digital currencies and widespread interest from consumers hoping to make a quick buck.</p> <p>Those behind the apps are estimated to have made around \$350,000 from their victims by charging for the initial app download and subsequent 'virtual hardware' or 'subscription upgrades' that claim to increase coin mining rates.</p> <p>In reality, the apps offer nothing under the surface, according to Lookout application security researcher Ioannis Gasparis.</p> <p>"After successfully logging in, a user is greeted with an activity dashboard that displays the available hash mining rate as well as how many coins they have 'earned.' The hash rate displayed is typically very low in order to lure the user into buying upgrades that promise faster mining rates," he explained.</p>

	<p>“After analyzing the code and network traffic, we also discovered the apps display a fictitious coin balance and not the number of coins mined.”</p> <p>Users are not allowed to withdraw coins until their account balance has hit a minimum level, which is impossible as balances are frequently reset to zero.</p> <p>“What enabled BitScam and CloudScam apps to fly under the radar is that they don’t do anything actually malicious,” said Gasparis. “In fact, they hardly do anything at all. They are simply shells to collect money for services that don’t exist.”</p> <p>These apps have scammed around 96,000 victims. Although Google Play has removed the offending titles, dozens more remain on third-party app stores, Lookout warned.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 Cybercrime costs firms \$1.79M/minute
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cybercrime-costs-orgs-per-minute/
GIST	<p>Cybercrime costs organizations an incredible \$1.79m every minute, according to RiskIQ’s 2021 Evil Internet Minute Report.</p> <p>The study, which analyzed the volume of malicious activity on the internet, laid bare the scale and damage of cyber-attacks in the past year, finding that 648 cyber-threats occurred every minute.</p> <p>The researchers calculated that the average cost of a breach is \$7.2 per minute, while the overall predicted cybersecurity spend is \$280,060 every minute.</p> <p>E-commerce has been heavily hit by online payment fraud in the past year, with cyber-criminals taking advantage of the shift to online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the e-commerce industry saw a record \$861.1bn in sales, it lost \$38,052 to online payment fraud every minute.</p> <p>Healthcare, another sector that has faced a surge in cyber-attacks since the start of COVID-19, lost \$13 per minute on digital security breaches in the past year.</p> <p>The report also looked at the impact of different forms of cybercrime. It showed that per minute, there was \$3615 lost to cryptocurrency scams, 525,600 records compromised and six organizations victimized by ransomware.</p> <p>The scale of cyber-attacks last year was further underlined by the fact that one Magecart host was detected every 31 minutes, one vulnerable Microsoft Exchange server was patched every 1.7 minutes and one malicious mobile app blocklisted every five minutes.</p> <p>According to Lou Manousos, CEO of RiskIQ, cybercrime is easier than ever to participate in: “Better threat technology makes cyber-criminals more effective and wealthier than ever before. We have compiled the vast numbers associated with cybercrime over the past year with help from our Internet Intelligence Graph and third-party sources to help businesses and researchers better understand what they’re up against.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Fake copyright complaints push malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fake-copyright-complaints-push-icedid-malware-using-yandex-forms/
GIST	Website owners are being targeted with fake copyright infringement complaints that utilize Yandex Forms to distribute the IcedID banking malware.

For over a year, threat actors tracked as TA578 have been conducting these attacks where they use a website's contact page to send legal threats to convince recipients to download a report of the offending material.

These reports allegedly contain proof of DDoS attacks or copyrighted material used without permission but instead infect a target's device with various malware, including [BazarLoader](#), [BumbleBee](#), and [IcedID](#).

Switching to Yandex forms

This week, BleepingComputer received a new version of the "Copyright infringement" threat pretending to be from Zoho, stating that we are utilizing their copyrighted images.

However, what was different with this campaign is that instead of using Google Drive or Google Sites to host their alleged "reports" like they did in the past, the threat actors are now using Yandex Forms.

Yandex Forms is a free service that allows users to create customized online forms but can also be used by threat actors to create phishing landing pages.

When a person clicks on the forms.yandex.com link in the copyright complaint, they are brought to a webpage that states, "File 'Stolen Images Evidence' is ready for download."

After a brief time, the Yandex Form will download an ISO file named 'Stolen_ImagesEvidence.iso' from an embedded firebasestorage.googleapis.com link in the Yandex Form.

An ISO file is a disk image file format that will mount as a new drive letter when opened in Windows 10 and Windows 11 so that you can access the enclosed files.

ISO files have become a popular attachment in phishing attacks as it bypasses the propagating of the Mark-of-the-Web to the contained files, causing Windows not to warn that they are risky when you attempt to open them.

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HEADLINE	07/08 Free decryptor AstraLocker, Yashma
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/free-decryptor-released-for-astralocker-yashma-ransomware-victims/
GIST	<p>New Zealand-based cybersecurity firm Emsisoft has released a free decryption tool to help AstraLocker and Yashma ransomware victims recover their files without paying a ransom.</p> <p>The free tool is available for download from Emsisoft's servers, and it allows you to recover encrypted files using easy-to-follow instructions available in this usage guide [PDF].</p> <p>"Be sure to quarantine the malware from your system first, or it may repeatedly lock your system or encrypt files," Emsisoft warned.</p> <p>"By default, the decryptor will pre-populate the locations to decrypt with the currently connected drives and network drives. Additional locations can be added using the 'Add' button."</p> <p>The ransomware decryptor will allow you to keep the files encrypted in the attack as a failsafe if the decrypted files are not identical to the original documents.</p> <p>"The AstraLocker decryptor is for the Babuk-based one using .Astra or .babyk extension, and they released a total of 8 keys," Emsisoft added.</p> <p>"The Yashma decryptor is for the Chaos-based one using .AstraLocker or a random .[a-z0-9]{4} extension, and they released a total of 3 keys."</p>

Emsisoft also advised AstraLocker and Yashma victims whose systems were compromised via Windows Remote Desktop to change the passwords for all user accounts that have permissions to log in remotely and to look for other local accounts the ransomware operators might have added.

The decryptor was released after the threat actor behind AstraLocker ransomware [told BleepingComputer](#) this week that they're shutting down the operation with a plan to switch to cryptomining.

"It was fun, and fun things always end sometime. I'm closing the operation, decryptors are in zip files, clean. I will come back," AstraLocker's developer told us. "I'm done with ransomware for now. I'm going in cryptojacking lol."

The ransomware developer shared a [ZIP archive with AstraLocker and Yashma decryptors](#) they submitted to the VirusTotal malware analysis platform.

Even though they did not reveal the reason behind the AstraLocker shutdown, the most likely cause is the sudden publicity brought by [recent reports](#) that would have landed the operation in law enforcement crosshairs.

AstraLocker is based on Babuk Locker (Babyk) ransomware, a buggy yet still dangerous strain that had its source code [leaked in September on a hacker forum](#).

While it doesn't happen very often, other ransomware groups had also released decryption keys and decryptors to BleepingComputer and security researchers in the past, either as a gesture of goodwill when shutting down or when they released new versions.

The list of previously released decryption tools includes [Ragnarok](#), [Avaddon](#), [SynAck](#), [AES-NI](#), [Shade](#), [FilesLocker](#), [TeslaCrypt](#), [Crysis](#), [Ziggy](#), and [FonixLocker](#).

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HEADLINE	07/07 Quantum ransomware impact to healthcare
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/quantum-ransomware-attack-affects-657-healthcare-orgs/
GIST	<p>Professional Finance Company Inc. (PFC), a full-service accounts receivables management company, says that a ransomware attack in late February led to a data breach affecting over 600 healthcare organizations.</p> <p>Founded in 1904, PFC helps thousands of healthcare, government, and utility organizations across the U.S. ensure that customers pay their invoices on time.</p> <p>The company started notifying the impacted healthcare providers' patients on May 5, saying that an ongoing investigation discovered that the attackers accessed files containing their personal information before encrypting some of PFC's systems.</p> <p>Sensitive information exposed during the attack includes patients' first and last names, addresses, accounts receivable balance and information regarding payments made to accounts.</p> <p>In some cases, the files also contained dates of birth, social security numbers, and health insurance and medical treatment information.</p> <p>While PFC did not share the exact number of affected healthcare providers, it linked to a PDF file listing all the impacted orgs containing the names of 657 healthcare entities.</p> <p>"PFC today is mailing letters to potentially involved individuals with detail about the incident and providing resources they can use to help protect their information," the company said.</p>

"PFC is also offering potentially involved individuals access to free credit monitoring and identity theft protection services through Cyberscout, a leading identity protection company."

Quantum ransomware attack

Although PFC did not reveal the name of the ransomware used to encrypt its systems, AdvIntel CEO [Vitali Kremez](#) told BleepingComputer that members of the Quantum ransomware gang were behind the February attack.

"Our [Andariel platform](#) detected the PFC attack via signal collections on February 23, 2022 from the Cobalt Strike infrastructure with the early warning details following the attack flow," Kremez told BleepingComputer.

"The attackers behind the operations are linked to Conti/Quantum ransomware sub-group moving laterally inside using Cobalt Strike and exfiltrating data via command-line tools."

Quantum ransomware surfaced as a rebrand of the [MountLocker ransomware operation](#), a ransomware strain first deployed in attacks starting in September 2020.

Since then, the gang has [rebranded multiple times using various other names](#), including AstroLocker, XingLocker, and Quantum.

The rebrand to Quantum was first observed in August 2021, when their ransomware encryptor switched to adding the .quantum file extension to encrypted files' names.

Advanced Intel's Yelisey Boguslavskiy also told BleepingComputer in June that some members of the Conti cybercrime syndicate have joined the ranks of the Quantum operation after the Conti brand was [shut down](#).

This is part of Conti's new modus operandi where its members have either infiltrated or taken control of other ransomware operations such as Hive, AvosLocker, [BlackCat](#), and Hello Kitty or data extortion gangs like [Karakurt](#), [BlackByte](#), and the [Bazarcall collective](#).

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HEADLINE	07/07 China Tonto Team APT ramps up spying
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/china-tonto-team-apt-spy-operations-russia
GIST	<p>Representing a significant increase in activity, a campaign linked to China started targeting Russia-linked organizations in June with malware designed to collect intelligence on government activities, according to analyses by security firms and Ukraine's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT).</p> <p>The attacks use purported government advisories sent as Rich Text Files (RTFs) in an attempt to convince victims to open the documents, thus allowing a remote code execution (RCE) exploit in Microsoft Office to be run. That's according to endpoint security firm SentinelOne, which stated in an analysis published on Thursday that the contents of the documents appear as security warnings written in Russian. They claim to warn agencies and infrastructure providers of potential attacks and advise them of compliance requirements under Russian law.</p> <p>Escalating Cyberattacks Against Russia</p> <p>While China has targeted Russia in the past, and vice versa, the pace of attacks — especially by the purported threat actor, Tonto Team — has grown following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, says Tom Hegel, a senior threat researcher at SentinelOne.</p> <p>"Tonto Team, like other Chinese actors, has a long history of targeting Russia," he says. "What we're seeing here is a potential Chinese government increase in intelligence collection requirements from inside Russia. Perhaps an increased prioritization or expansion of resources assigned to such tasking."</p>

The [reported increase in Chinese cyber operations](#) comes as Russia has strengthened diplomatic relations with China in the face of sanctions from Western nations. While the two major nations are not formal allies, they have [expanded trade and defense ties over the past decade](#) as a way to foil the expansion of Western alliances.

In addition, they have different approaches to pursuing their foreign policy goals. Russia has tacitly allowed cybercriminal gangs to operate in its territory and has also widely used cyber operations to steal intelligence and attack infrastructure, as well as an adjunct to military operations. For example, Russia has used [disinformation campaigns](#), [infrastructure attacks](#), and [espionage operations](#) in its conflict with Ukraine.

China, which has profited significantly from economic relations with Western nations, has mainly pursued non-military approaches to international relations and used cyber operations for acquiring intellectual property and conducting espionage. Treating Russia as any other adversary just shows consistency, says SentinelOne's Hegel.

This is "simply China looking out for itself in uncertain times," he says. "Like any well-resourced nation, they seek to support their own agenda through cyber, and the state of affairs in Russia may be adjusting just what they prioritize."

Technical Breadcrumbs Point to China

The recent campaigns have used two pieces of malware linked to Chinese advanced persistent threats (APTs): a toolkit used to build malicious documents known as Royal Road and a custom remote access Trojan (RAT) known as Bisonal used by Chinese actors. The Tonto Team — [also known as Karma Panda and Bronze Huntley](#) — traditionally has focused on other Asian nations, such as South Korea and Japan, as well as the United States and Taiwan. Recently, the group has increased its operations to Russia, Pakistan, and other nations.

While false flag operations, where one adversary attempts to disguise their operations as another attacker, have happened, a variety of evidence links the attacks to China.

At least seven threat groups — all linked to China — use Royal Road to create malicious documents as part of the initial attack aimed at gaining access to targeted systems. In April, for example, cyberthreat intelligence firm DomainTools analyzed an document created with the Royal Road malware building toolkit that had the hallmarks of a Chinese espionage campaign and targeted a Russian underwater research and weapons development organization.

"Combined with the sensitive targeting and the attempts at hardening the ultimate payload, it appears the adversary went to some effort to evade analysis of their activity as well," [the analysis stated](#). "Although this campaign appears specifically targeted to an entity in the Russian Federation, the underlying behaviors of this campaign — from malicious document usage through binary execution guardrails and controls — provide helpful insight into adversary tradecraft from which all defenders can learn valuable lessons."

In addition, Bisonal is used exclusively by Chinese groups, according to the advisories.

Companies should take note that nation-state attacks can often affect private businesses. The SentinelOne advisory has indicators of compromise (IoCs) for the latest campaigns, and DomainTools highlights various countermeasures for detecting and blunting cyber-espionage attacks.

Organizations should use the intelligence to check their own defenses against similar attacks, says SentinelOne's Hegel.

"Targets of espionage or disruption in today's world are not isolated to government networks but can overflow or directly hit private business simply because of their stance on a political issue or where they operate," he says. "As we observed when Ukraine was invaded, things can shift overnight — so CISOs should remain aware of this activity as we continue to live with such geopolitical tension."

HEADLINE	07/06 Crooks target Amazon Prime Day shoppers
SOURCE	https://www.techrepublic.com/article/cyber-criminals-target-amazon-prime-day-shoppers/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Cyber criminals like to exploit seasonal activities and events, especially ones that garner a lot of attention from the public. Amazon Prime Day is one such seasonal event in which the retail giant kicks off a series of tempting sales for consumers looking to save money.</p> <p>As in past years, scammers have already been targeting Prime shoppers in an attempt to deploy malware or steal sensitive information. A report released Wednesday by cyber threat intelligence provider Check Point Research examines the types of threats facing Prime shoppers and offers advice on how to avoid them.</p> <p>Cyber criminal activity for Amazon Prime Day</p> <p>In advance of this year's Amazon Prime Day set for July 12 and 13, Check Point said it has seen a 37% jump in Amazon-related phishing attacks at the start of July compared with the daily average for June. Further, almost 1,900 new domains using the term "Amazon" popped up in June, with almost 10% of them found to be either malicious or suspicious.</p> <p>However, this year's activity shows a decrease from last year when 2,303 new Amazon-related domains were found in the weeks prior to Amazon Prime Day, and a full 78% of them were considered risky.</p> <p>Why the decline? Cyber criminals may not be using the term "Amazon" in their domain registration so as to avoid being detected. Plus, these scammers might be saving these domains for a future use and don't want them to appear on anyone's radar.</p> <p>Among the phishing emails already detected by Check Point, one claims to be for an Amazon order that was cancelled due to payment issues. The message pretends to be from Amazon Customer Support with a subject line of "Order Canceled Unpaid INV." But any recipient who clicks on the attached file will find their computer infected with a dropper malware.</p> <p>Another phishing scam, this one targeting Amazon customers in Japan, invites the recipient to click on a link to approve a payment method for an Amazon item. Doing so, however, takes the victim to a phony login site that asks them to enter their Amazon account credentials. Following Check Point's investigation, the site has been offline.</p> <p>Protecting yourself from Amazon Prime Day phishing scams</p> <p>Phishing emails use certain key psychological tactics to try to convince unsuspecting users to take the bait. Such emails often create a sense of urgency to prevent the recipient from thinking too much about whether the message is legitimate or not.</p> <p>To convey an air of authority, these emails sometimes claim to be from a CEO or top executive in a company. Some phishing emails even threaten the recipient by vowing to expose stolen personal data unless the person complies.</p> <p>To protect yourself from phishing scams, especially those centered around Amazon Prime Day, Check Point offers several tips:</p> <p>Watch out for emails that misspell Amazon.com. Check for misspellings of Amazon and for sites that use a similar top-level domain. These copycat sites may look like Amazon's actual site but are designed to trick you.</p> <p>Look for the lock icon. Don't buy anything from a website that does not have Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption. You can tell if the site uses SSL by looking for the S in HTTPs or checking the lock icon in the address bar or status bar.</p>

Share as little information as possible. No online retailer needs to know your birthday or social security number. The more you reveal, the more easily attackers can hijack one of your accounts.

Have a strong Amazon password. In advance of Amazon Prime Day, make sure your Amazon password is strong. The stronger the password, the more difficult your account will be to crack should it ever be breached.

Beware of public Wi-Fi networks. Whether you're at an airport, hotel, or coffee shop, don't use a public network to shop on Amazon Prime Day. Attackers can intercept your activity to access email, payment details, and other sensitive information.

Watch out for bargains that sound too good to be true. The deals can be great on Prime Day. But be wary if they sound too great, as that may mean you're shopping at a copycat site.

Use your credit card. When shopping online, always try to use your credit card and not a debit card. Credit cards offer more protection and less liability should they be stolen.

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HEADLINE	07/07 QNAP warns: new Checkmate ransomware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/qnap-warns-of-new-checkmate-ransomware-targeting-nas-devices/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Network-attached storage (NAS) vendor QNAP warned customers to secure their devices against attacks using Checkmate ransomware to encrypt data.</p> <p>QNAP says the attacks are focused on Internet-exposed QNAP devices with the SMB service enabled and accounts with weak passwords that can easily be cracked in brute-force attacks.</p> <p>"A new ransomware known as Checkmate has recently been brought to our attention," the NAS maker said in a security advisory published Thursday.</p> <p>"Preliminary investigation indicates that Checkmate attacks via SMB services exposed to the internet, and employs a dictionary attack to break accounts with weak passwords."</p> <p>Checkmate is a recently discovered ransomware strain, first deployed in attacks around May 28, that appends a .checkmate extension to encrypted files and drops a ransom note named !CHECKMATE_DECRYPTION_README.</p> <p>While there aren't any reports on QNAP's official forums or online social networks, victims have been sharing files locked using Checkmate ransomware in a dedicated BleepingComputer forum thread.</p> <p>Based on ransom notes seen so far by BleepingComputer, the attackers ask victims to pay \$15,000 worth of bitcoins to get a decryptor and a decryption key.</p> <p>According to QNAP, the threat actors behind this campaign will remotely login into devices exposed to remote access with the help of accounts compromised in dictionary attacks.</p> <p>After gaining access, they start encrypting files in shared folders (however, victim reports say that all the data is encrypted).</p> <p>The company warned customers not to expose their NAS devices to Internet access and to use VPN software to reduce the attack surface and block threat actors' attempts to log in using compromised accounts.</p> <p>QNAP users were also urged to review all their NAS accounts immediately and ensure they're using strong passwords, back up their files, and take backup snapshots regularly to restore their data.</p>

HEADLINE	07/06 American Marriage Ministries data breach
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/american-marriage-ministries-acknowledges-data-exposure-after-earlier-incident-reported-to-fbi/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Wedding officiant training company American Marriage Ministries (AMM) said it is dealing with another data security issue after reporting a breach of sensitive data to the FBI earlier this year.</p> <p>American Marriage Ministries – a non-denominational church based in Seattle that trains and ordains people to officiate weddings – told The Record it hired a forensic investigator in December to look into “an incident that might have exposed an incomplete list of AMM minister names and dates of birth being accessible on the internet.”</p> <p>By the end of January, the company spokesperson said the investigator confirmed that the data was accessed and their team “locked” the list down “with secure settings to prevent a similar event from happening in the future.”</p> <p>“We also reported this matter to the FBI by filing an IC3 report with the Federal Bureau of Investigation,” the spokesperson said.</p> <p>But security researchers with WebsitePlanet released a report this week that said they found an unsecured Amazon bucket containing a large amount of data from the church, without any password protection or encryption controls in place.</p> <p>The information exposed was 630 GB of data on about 185,000 officiants and roughly 15,000 married couples as well as their wedding guests.</p> <p>Ministers’ program application forms, over 500,000 ordination certificates and minister identification documents, and marriage licenses that contain details about newly-wedded couples and more was included in the batch of data.</p> <p>The data trove included personal information on ministers including full names, email addresses, phone numbers, minister IDs, home addresses and photos of officiants. It also contained the personal information of married couples’ including wedding certificates, dates of weddings, locations of weddings and pictures from weddings.</p> <p>WebsitePlanet reported the exposed data to AMM and US-CERT on April 29 and said the bucket was secured on May 11.</p> <p>When asked about this latest data exposure, AMM confirmed that the exposed data was locked down on May 11 but said it was “continuing to look at this report.”</p> <p>Despite the discovery of the most recent breach, the company said it believes its response to the incident in December 2021 “demonstrates how seriously we take the security of our website, and of our ministers.”</p> <p>“We will continue to investigate and respond to this report in a way that ensures the security of our website and our ministers’ information,” the company said.</p> <p>WebsitePlanet said it is unclear if the latest exposed information was ever accessed by hackers.</p> <p>AMM has ordained more than 900,000 ministers throughout the U.S since it was founded in 2009.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 How bad is the crypto market crash?
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coinbase-crypto-market-crash-bitcoin-growth/

Among those reeling from the billions of dollars lost in the [cryptocurrency crash](#), no company has taken a greater beating than Coinbase. The nation's largest and first publicly traded crypto exchange, Coinbase has seen its stock price [plunge](#) 81% this year, and has recently announced plans to [shed one-fifth of its staff](#).

With Coinbase [reporting a \\$430 million first-quarter loss](#), some hedge funds are starting to short the stock, meaning Wall Street is betting on Coinbase's value dropping even further.

But all is not lost for the exchange, according to analysts, who see more bounce to the crypto bubble than the current crash suggests. Despite its recent struggles, they predict Coinbase will make it through this crypto market slump and ultimately thrive. That's because the company has learned how to survive such downturns, analysts say.

Coinbase, founded in 2012, established itself years before the cryptocurrency craze or the current "crypto winter" hit the U.S. It has now captured a \$13.8 billion market cap with about 5,000 employees and \$256 billion in assets on the platform.

"Coinbase has been through a few crypto winters and, each time, they obviously have survived," said John Todaro, a crypto asset researcher for Needham & Co. "The winter would have to get progressively worse for Coinbase to be in any real danger."

Coinbase's \$6 billion in reserves bolster his confidence. That money is "a pretty solid cushion" to help Coinbase get through turbulent times, Todaro said.

Profits based on number of transactions

Coinbase didn't respond to a request for comment on how the crypto market has impacted business. CEO Brian Armstrong said during an earnings call in May that Coinbase officials "tend to do our best work in a down period."

Still, one of the reasons Coinbase is struggling now is because there are fewer people on the platform making transactions. Coinbase makes a majority of its revenue by charging a 1% [fee](#) on every crypto transaction, but company officials said in May that the volume of transactions has slowed. The number of Coinbase monthly users has dropped 19% since the end of last year, the company said.

The drop in transactions makes Coinbase's \$6 billion war chest even more important, said Devin Ryan, an equity research analyst at JMP Securities.

"They are one of the best capitalized firms," Ryan told CBS MoneyWatch. "And even though they have a business model today that's based off transactions, they're building one of the most diversified businesses in the (crypto) industry."

Crypto downturn is exacerbated by soaring inflation

Not only is Coinbase seeing fewer transactions, but crypto prices have dropped to their lowest levels this year.

The price of bitcoin, ethereum and other major tokens started falling this spring as rising inflation tightened its grip on the U.S. economy. With the cost of everyday items like gas and groceries increasing, investors began pulling their money out of investments they deemed risky, including cryptocurrencies. As investors sold off their digital assets, the price of crypto fell further.

[Stablecoins losing their pegs](#) to the U.S. dollar also played a role in investors' departure from crypto in recent months. Individuals who had grown dependent on stablecoins like luna and terraUSD to shield their money from the wild swings typical of many cryptocurrencies, were stunned to see both those coins fall under \$1 in May — something that was never supposed to happen. The price drop of the two benchmark stablecoins further eroded investors' faith in the crypto market.

Meanwhile, bitcoin's price, which peaked last November at around \$68,000, is down 56% since the beginning of this year, trading at around \$20,250 as of Wednesday. Ripple has fallen 61% to around 30 cents and ethereum is down nearly 70% to \$1,140.

Ryan believes the recent price slumps won't last forever and that investors will return to crypto. Once they do, they will likely use Coinbase, according to Ryan.

"We expect them to gain even more market share after this, but no doubt we're in a difficult moment right now in the market," he said.

As the crypto market goes, so goes Coinbase

Coinbase is a real-time case study of what happens to a crypto company when the price of bitcoin and tokens fall, analysts say. Coinbase's future hinges on prices growing stronger, as do the futures of other major crypto platforms like FTX and Kraken, analysts said.

The crypto landscape is much broader and richer now than it was in April 2021 [when Coinbase went public](#) and its shares were trading at almost \$400 a piece. Competitors like Binance and Crypto.com have captured investors' attention, while [crypto scams and hacks have grown more lucrative](#), leading federal lawmakers to push for more regulation around digital assets.

All that activity, analysts said, has created an even greater divide between pro-crypto investors and skeptics. How quickly Coinbase rebounds depends on how many investors "believe there's a big future for digital assets," Ryan said.

"If you have a positive view on the future of the crypto economy and you're bullish on where it can get to, then that should be your same view on Coinbase," he said.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	07/07 Florida man jailed 20yrs for terror support
SOURCE	https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/man-sentenced-20-years-prison-attempting-provide-material-support-isis-1
GIST	<p>A Florida man was sentenced today to 20 years in federal prison, followed by 15 years of supervised release, for attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, also known as ISIS, a designated foreign terrorist organization.</p> <p>Romeo Xavier Langhorne, 32, of St. Augustine, pleaded guilty in the Middle District of Florida to one count of attempting to provide material support to ISIS on May 13, 2021. According to court documents, Langhorne pledged his allegiance to ISIS at some point in 2014, knowing that ISIS was a designated foreign terrorist organization that engaged in acts of terrorism. Between 2018 and 2019, Langhorne reaffirmed his support of ISIS on various social media accounts, posted ISIS-produced videos to his YouTube account and participated in online ISIS chat rooms with like-minded individuals. In December 2018 and January 2019, Langhorne expressed in one of those chat rooms an interest in creating a video that would improve on existing videos demonstrating the making and use of a deadly explosive, triacetone triperoxide (TATP).</p> <p>In February 2019, Langhorne began communicating with an undercover employee (UCE) of the FBI who was posing as someone working on behalf of ISIS. Langhorne told the UCE about his plans to create and disseminate an instructional video on making TATP and sought the UCE's assistance in creating the video. Langhorne told the UCE that, in order to ensure that the video was not removed from the internet by service providers, it should include disclaimers advising that it was intended for educational purposes. However, Langhorne informed the UCE that his true purpose in making and distributing the video was to arm ISIS adherents and others with knowledge of how to make TATP and use it for terrorism-related purposes in support of ISIS.</p>

	<p>During the summer of 2019, Langhorne sent multiple messages to the UCE for assistance with creating a Nasheed, which is a form of Islamic vocal music. Langhorne stated he wanted the Nasheed to include a particular recording of an ISIS member yelling “Allahu Akbar” while breaking out of prison, as well as a clip of children saying, “kill them all.” Langhorne explained that he wanted the Nasheed “to encourage justified retaliation” against the United States for its role in killing Muslims.</p> <p>The FBI produced a video in accordance with Langhorne’s instructions, but – unbeknownst to Langhorne – it featured an inert chemical formula for TATP that would not produce an explosion. In November 2019, the UCE provided versions of the TATP video to Langhorne, and Langhorne distributed the video by uploading it to a video-sharing website.</p> <p>Langhorne was arrested at his residence in Roanoke, Virginia, on Nov. 15, 2019. Langhorne admitted in a post-arrest interview that he had “probably at some point” pledged allegiance to both ISIS and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was the leader of ISIS from 2014 until his death on Oct. 26, 2019. Langhorne admitted that he communicated with the UCE and that he uploaded the TATP video to the internet.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Terror boss escaped in mass prison break
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/notorious-global-terror-boss-escaped-in-nigeria-mass-prison-break-jail-officials-say?source=articles&via=rss
GIST	<p>ABUJA, Nigeria—The militants that carried out Tuesday night attack on the Kuje medium-security prison, just outside Nigeria's capital, Abuja, freed dozens of jihadists including the leader of the brutal terrorist group, Ansaru, according to a number of Nigerian security officials.</p> <p>Armed with bombs, Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPGs) and General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG), the attackers, who arrived at about 10:05 p.m. local time, gained access through the back of the prison, using dynamites to destroy the heavily fortified facility, freeing 600 out of the prison's 994 inmates, according to the country's defense minister, Bashir Magashi, who said 64 of those freed were jihadists.</p> <p>“Most likely, they [the attackers] are Boko Haram members because we have [a] sizable number of Boko Haram suspects in detention, and presently we cannot locate any of them,” Magashi told reporters on Wednesday morning. “They have all escaped.”</p> <p>The Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), which has recently been working closely with Ansaru, later claimed responsibility for the attack and even released a video showing a part of the prison in flames and many of the inmates fleeing the prison. Militants from both groups worked together in carrying out the March attack on the Abuja to Kaduna train in northern Nigeria in which nine people were killed and over 65 abducted.</p> <p>The government has not officially named the jihadists that were freed by the attackers, but three security officials told The Daily Beast that Ansaru leader Khalid al Barnawi and six of his close lieutenants were among those who escaped.</p> <p>“He [al Barnawi] had been here for a couple of years,” an official at the Kuje prison who was on duty at the facility when the jihadists invaded told The Daily Beast. “They [the attackers] came specifically to free him and his colleagues.”</p> <p>A combined team of Nigerian security agencies had arrested al Barnawi, whose real name is Mohammed Usman, in 2016 and charged him in connection to the death of Italian engineer Franco Lamolinara and his British colleague, Chris McManus. The two men were killed by their Ansaru captors in the northwestern city of Sokoto in March 2012 after a British-Nigerian rescue operation was launched. The Ansaru leader was also allegedly behind the abduction of Francis Collomp, a Frenchman who escaped from his captors in November 2013, and Edgar Raupach, a German who was killed during a military raid in the northwestern state of Kano in May 2012.</p>

In 2013, al Barnawi and his Ansaru colleagues [seized](#) two Lebanese, two Syrians, an Italian, a Greek and a Briton, from a construction site in the northeastern city of Bauchi. The victims were transported to the vast Sambisa Forest that covers a large part of the northeast, [killed](#) and buried in a shallow grave.

Ansaru's full Arabic name, Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan, translates to: "Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa." The group [announced](#) that it split from Boko Haram in January 2012, claiming that Boko Haram was "inhuman" for killing innocent Muslims as well as for targeting defectors.

Unlike Boko Haram, which is notorious for its indiscriminate shootings and bombings, Ansaru, which says it eschews the killing of fellow Nigerians, seems to prefer a more calculated approach: kidnapping and killing foreigners.

The group was founded by Abu Usmatul al Ansari, a little-known militant believed to have been trained by al Qaeda in Algeria. But his name is rarely mentioned in connection with Ansaru attacks. Instead, most of the credit goes to 51-year-old al Barnawi, another al Qaeda-trained jihadist who's regarded by many of Ansaru's militants as the "active" leader of the group. The jihadist was labeled a "global terrorist" in 2012 by the U.S. government, which also offered a \$5 million reward for "information that brings to justice" al Barnawi.

The order to remand the terror leader in the Kuje prison was issued on March 14, 2017 by Justice John Tshoho of Federal High Court in Abuja after he was charged with conspiracy, hostage taking, supporting a terrorist group, membership of a terrorist group, illegal possession of firearms and concealing information on terrorism. Al Barnawi was arraigned along with his second wife Halima Aliya, who was charged with concealing information about the Ansaru organization, and five of his lieutenants—Mohammed Bashir Saleh, Umar Bello (aka Abu Azzan); Mohammed Salisu (aka Datti); Yakubu Nuhu (aka Bello Maishayi), and Usman Abubakar (aka Mugiratu)—who were charged with the same offense as him and also ordered to be remanded in Kuje.

Nigerian authorities did not immediately obey the order. Rather, the prosecution counsel returned to court with an application seeking Justice Tsoho to vary his earlier directive and have al Barnawi and co be kept under the custody of the Department of State Service (DSS), the country's secret police. That request was granted on April 25, 2017 but would later lead to Tsoho disqualifying himself from the trial after the suspects accused him of bias. Nothing has been reported in the media since then, as subsequent trials appear to have been held in secret.

"He [al Barnawi] was later brought to Kuje [prison], another official at the Kuje Correctional Center, as the prison facility is officially known, told The Daily Beast privately. "Since the attack took place, nobody knows his whereabouts."

A DSS official also told The Daily Beast that al Barnawi was not in the custody of the agency but had been "sent to Kuje prison a long time ago."

"They [Kuje prison officials] have had him for some time now," the official said but did not give details of when al Barnawi was moved. "He is not with the DSS."

How the terrorists managed to attack a well guided facility just by the nation's capital with such ease shows just challenged Nigeria's security system is. A popular local news website, *Foundation for Investigative Journalism*, [reported that](#) the attackers had so much free time on their hands that they first delivered a 15-minute Quranic lecture to inmates before setting them free and even spent time sharing transportation fares with the jihadists they came to rescue.

According to the on-duty prison official who spoke to The Daily Beast, the attackers even made attempts to get to the cell of disgraced "super cop" Abba Kyari, who has been in the Kuje prison since March after

he was arrested over his alleged involvement in a cocaine smuggling cartel. The policeman was kept in a highly-fortified cell close to the main gate that was difficult to penetrate.

“They were asking other inmates, ‘where is Abba Kyari?,” said the official. “It was clear that they wanted to attack him, but when they couldn’t get to him, they went away.”

Once lauded as Nigeria’s most decorated cop, Kyari, a Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of the Force’s Intelligence Response Team (IRT) until his suspension, was conferred with a Presidential medal of courage from Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari in 2016 after his team [rescued three kidnapped schoolgirls](#) in Lagos. He won the Lagos State government’s top award for gallantry for straight three years, from 2011 and 2013, for successfully taking down high profile criminal gangs and kidnapping squads. But an FBI indictment linking him to money launderer Ramon Abbas, also known as Hushpuppi, who is awaiting sentencing by a U.S. court for his role in cybercrimes, led to his suspension last August by the Nigeria police. He has been incarcerated since he was [caught on camera](#) attempting to bribe a drug enforcement officer over a cocaine deal.

Kyari remains in custody despite the attack that destroyed a part of the Kuje prison but die-hard terrorists, freed by their comrades, continue to pose a threat to safety of so many Nigerians. Their escape from prison all but exposes the weakness of the country’s security apparatus to the surprise of even the commander-in-chief.

“I am disappointed with the intelligence system,” President Buhari told reporters after accessing the level of damage at the prison. “How can terrorists organize, have weapons, attack a security installation and get away with it?”

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	07/07 Washington households w/air conditioning
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/news-and-city-life/2022/07/how-many-households-washington-state-have-air-conditioning
GIST	<p>SINCE THE HEAT DOME, and even before, everyone’s been wondering how many households in our corner of the world have finally embraced air conditioning. Yesterday, we received our best clue yet—though it still leaves plenty to the imagination.</p> <p>A new nationwide survey from the U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that 53 percent of households in Washington used some form of air conditioning in 2020, the second least of any state (AC? Alaskans would never). About 30 percent of Washingtonian homes deployed central air to cool their homes, well below the 67 percent national average for states. A quarter installed individual units.</p> <p>The Residential Energy Consumption Survey arrives with an important caveat: The data doesn’t tell us how many people sprung for AC to prepare for that treacherous heat wave last year, naturally, since its responses are from 2020, not late 2021. Nor does it detail how many people in Seattle ponied up.</p> <p>But it is the first time this particular U.S. Energy survey has released state-level data, offering a rare snapshot of how people cool off across Washington and its many climes. A few other takeaways from the data drop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• While we had the second-least AC use of any state, a handful of others—New York, New Hampshire, Hawai’i, Maine, and Vermont—had fewer homes, proportionally, with central air.• We’re no fan of fans. Oddly, given our lack of AC, only 44 percent of Washington homes have ceiling fans. That’s last among states. (It must be a Washington thing; DC is at 41 percent.)• Nationally, our neighbors might rank low, but both Oregon and Idaho have much higher percentages of homes using air conditioning: 76 and 80, respectively.

	We'll have to wait for the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 American Housing Survey to get city-by-city numbers. In 2019, about 44 percent of Seattle homes had air conditioning , per the AHS. The bureau relayed that data will be out later this quarter.
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HEADLINE	07/07 Summers hotter, longer in Washington
SOURCE	https://patch.com/washington/seattle/summers-are-hotter-longer-washington-analysis-shows
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — It doesn't just feel as if summers are longer and hotter than they used to be in Pacific Northwest. Federal climate data, assembled in a new study by the nonprofit research group Climate Central, backs that up.</p> <p>We're less than three weeks into summer 2022, but much of the country has already experienced hotter-than-normal temperatures, according to the private weather company AccuWeather. Puget Sound has fared better, rolling its cool spring into a mild start to the season, apart from a quick brush with the 90s in late June.</p> <p>That's a lot different than the same time last year, when a "heat dome" event pushed Seattle beyond 100 degrees on three consecutive days, doubling the number of triple-digit days on record for the Emerald City. This year, climate outlooks tilt the odds in favor of Western Washington staying cooler than usual through July, but many states may not be so lucky.</p> <p>On average, temperatures in the Western region, which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, increased by 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit from 2017-2021, compared to from 1971-2000, according to the Climate Central study, The Washington Post reported.</p> <p>The outlook going forward isn't good. Overall, federal agencies project more dangerously hot days, a worsening of drought conditions, more wildfires and more hurricanes. The effects of climate change are most sharply felt in the West.</p> <p>Reno, Nev., where summer temperatures have increased 10.9 degrees F., on average, since 1970, is the fastest-warming city in the country during the hottest months, according to the Climate Central study.</p> <p>The increasing temperatures can cause heat emergencies that increase hospitalizations. Heat-related illnesses are among the deadliest weather-related illnesses in the United States.</p> <p>Geographic tolerance for heat is among the factors considered by researchers studying heat-related hospitalizations for a 2019 study. They found heat-related hospitalizations begin at lower heat indices in cooler regions than in the South and Southeast.</p> <p>For example, heat-related hospitalizations begin with heat indices around 105 degrees F. in Texas, but 81 degrees F. in the Pacific Northwest. According to Climate Central, the greater Seattle area can expect at least three days of "extreme heat" — that is, days with a heat index of 90 degrees F. or hotter.</p> <p>When it's that hot, the risk of heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke, muscle cramps or heat exhaustion increases, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Climate Central analysis found the 25 cities with the biggest increase in dangerously hot days are found in Texas and the Southeast. All of those cities are seeing two additional weeks of extremely hot days, compared to 1970.</p> <p>Following last year's deadly heat wave in the Pacific Northwest, state and county leaders have worked to stand up new measures, including an "extreme heat mitigation strategy" announced last month in King County, and new state labor rules mandating stronger protections for outdoor workers.</p> <p>Climate Central looked at historic data from 246 U.S. locations to calculate the increase in extremely hot days from 1970-2021. The analysis found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 1970, 74 percent (184) reported more extremely hot days annually.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 51 percent (126) had at least seven additional extremely hot days annually. • The largest change was in Austin, Texas, with 43 additional days above 100 degrees F.
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HEADLINE	07/07 Fish fell from sky then washed ashore
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/us/anchovy-dead-falling-from-sky-california.html
GIST	<p>One night last month, Britt Gerhard and her husband heard a bang on the roof of their house in San Francisco around 8 p.m. It was so loud, they thought it was an earthquake.</p> <p>The couple had just put their 4-year-old daughter to bed, and Ms. Gerhard, a 38-year-old artist, was alarmed. Suddenly, shiny and silver things, each just a few inches long, began flying past the window.</p> <p>They were anchovies.</p> <p>“We went outside, and there were just fish everywhere, about 20 to 30 fish,” Ms. Gerhard said. “I was like, ‘OK, we’ve had a pandemic and fires and now, fish are falling from the sky.’”</p> <p>In the past month, a handful of residents in the Bay Area have reported similar occurrences. Then, last week, several thousand dead anchovies washed up about 30 miles north, on the shore of the Bolinas Lagoon.</p> <p>The happenings might seem bizarre, or even biblical, but scientists say they have a perfectly rational explanation: The anchovy population off the California coast is booming.</p> <p>Those that washed ashore were likely chased by marine predators into the shallow lagoon waters, where they soon got stuck and ran out of oxygen, said Jarrod Santora, a marine ecologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.</p> <p>As for the fish falling from the sky, he added, “That’s just birds carrying them back to their chicks, and they can only carry so many, and some of them fall out.”</p> <p>Dr. Santora said that the gulls that nest atop buildings in the city often fight one another for food, and that they might drop their fish in a process known as kleptoparasitism: “That’s when a bird beats up on another bird for its lunch.”</p> <p>Anchovies are a boom-and-bust species: Their populations naturally shrink and expand, and scientists don’t know exactly why. But since a marine heat wave that ended around 2016, the population of anchovies off the California coast has exploded “by orders of magnitude,” Dr. Santora said. It has created a banquet for the birds, sea lions and whales who feast on them, he added.</p> <p>“These humpbacks are recovering, and they’re very hungry,” Dr. Santora said, adding that he suspected that a group of the whales could have driven the anchovies into shallow water. The whales, he said, cooperatively feed in small groups by splitting the fish into smaller schools, weakening their defenses.</p> <p>“Five humpback whales can move an anchovy school basically anywhere they want to,” he added, “and just scoop it all up.”</p> <p>The mass anchovy die-off in Bolinas Lagoon was rare, but not unprecedented. In 2013, anchovies crowded into Santa Cruz harbor, depriving themselves of oxygen. The next year, a mass die-off of the tiny fish fouled an Oregon beach town. Earlier this year, thousands of the fish also washed up dead on a beach in Chile.</p> <p>Rudi Ferris, a fisherman who has lived in Bolinas for more than five decades, said that he recalled a handful of die-offs in the seaside town, and that only one, in the late 1970s, rivaled the carnage he witnessed last month.</p>

	<p>“It stunk horribly for a really long time,” said Mr. Ferris, 71. This time, he added, he watched the scene from afar through his binoculars. A mass of pelicans and gulls were “frantically eating,” he said.</p> <p>Staff members with Marin County Parks, which manages the lagoon, said that most of the fish had either been eaten or washed back out to sea, but that the phenomenon had provided a brief glimpse into the wonders of ocean life.</p> <p>“We don’t usually get to see how many fish are in the ocean,” said Max Korten, the director and general manager for Marin County Parks. He added, “It’s kind of amazing.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 New trend causes havoc for theater owners
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/minions-movie-makes-history-trend-havoc-theater-owners/story?id=86305691
GIST	<p>It's enough to make a supervillain cry.</p> <p>"Minions: The Rise of Gru," the latest film in the "Despicable Me" franchise, was released on July 1 and immediately set the record for most successful premiere during a July 4 weekend, according to IMDb. The film earned \$123 million over the four-day opening.</p> <p>The movie premiere also created a stir due to a TikTok trend called “Gentleminions,” a call for moviegoers to attend the film in formalwear and get rambunctious whenever the minions appear onscreen. The trend led to dozens of teens dressed in formalwear moshing and creating disturbances at theaters across the U.K.</p> <p>One movie theater refunded more than \$1,300 worth of tickets in one day. Another banned groups of guests wearing suits from entering the cinema. Another stopped showing the film altogether. The trend has been seen in movie theaters in the U.K., the U.S. and Australia.</p> <p>“Due to a small number of incidents in our cinemas over the weekend, we have had to restrict access in some circumstances,” a spokesperson for Odeon, which owns more than 100 theaters across the U.K., told ABC News.</p> <p>At one Odeon theater, a sign was put up advising customers that “any group of guests in formal attire will be refused entry for the showings of Minions: The Rise of Gru.”</p> <p>“Genuinely the scariest experience of my life,” commented TikTok user @wixmovs, who filmed the video.</p> <p>At the Mallard theater in Guernsey, manager Daniel Phillips-Smith told the BBC he experienced “stunningly bad behavior.” He added that large groups of teenagers were “throwing things,” swearing and abusing staff members.</p> <p>Phillips-Smith told the BBC he had to give between 100 and 200 discounts, which has had a “massive” financial impact on the theater. For the first time in the theater's history, managers made the decision to cancel the film screenings, although the film was reportedly restored the next day.</p> <p>At Vue cinema in Worcester, the manager told Worcester News that he had to provide more than \$1,300 worth of discounts on July 3 alone, because of disruptions.</p> <p>"Minions: The Rise of Gru" is the fourth film in the "Despicable Me" franchise, released five years after the previous film, "Despicable Me 3." The franchise’s eponymous “minions” are small yellow creatures who wear goggles and serve as assistants for the franchise’s protagonist, Gru, voiced by actor Steve Carell.</p>

	<p>These mischievous characters, who speak their own high-pitched gibberish language, have developed a broad fanbase, particularly among Gen Z moviegoers.</p> <p>When the film premiered on July 1, Universal Pictures tweeted out “to everyone showing up to @Minions in suits: we see you and we love you.” The official “Minions” Twitter account tweeted out simply “The Gentleminions” in response.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the Universal Pictures’ animation studio Illumination Entertainment did not respond to multiple requests for comment.</p> <p>Commentators across the internet have been speculating that the GentleMinions trend could have helped the film’s box office success. The Hollywood Reporter reported that 90% of the film’s audience is 25 and under, and the hashtag on TikTok has garnered 44 million views.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Mexico seizes ‘historic’ cache of fentanyl
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/mexico-seizes-historic-fentanyl-arrests
GIST	<p>Mexican authorities made what one official described as a "historic seizure" of fentanyl in a warehouse earlier this month.</p> <p>Mexico's Defense Department said the warehouse was located in Culiacan, the capital of Sinaloa state, home to the infamous drug cartel of the same name. Ten men were arrested.</p> <p>Soldiers also found a half-ton of meth in the July 2 raid, as well as cocaine, opium and at least 70 tons of precursor chemicals.</p> <p>Assistant Public Safety Secretary Ricardo Mejia called it the largest seizure in history of fentanyl. He estimated the 1,200 pounds of fentanyl found at the warehouse had a black market value of around \$230 million.</p> <p>Synthetic opioids like fentanyl have been behind a major increase in overdose deaths in the United States. Fentanyl is 100 times more potent than morphine and as little as two milligrams of fentanyl can be lethal.</p> <p>Fentanyl is usually pressed into counterfeit pills made to look like Xanax, Adderall or Oxycodone, or mixed into other drugs. That has led to tens of thousands of overdose deaths in the United States because people often do not realize they are taking fentanyl.</p> <p>The amount found at the warehouse could have produced millions of the counterfeit pills, however the purity was unclear. Almost all fentanyl smuggled into the United States comes from Mexico, where it is produced with precursor chemicals smuggled from China.</p> <p>Republican and Democratic lawmakers have called on the Biden administration to secure the border amid a historic surge in illegal crossings, which include human traffickers, drug cartel operatives, and smugglers bringing fentanyl and other illegal drugs into the United States. Illegally-made fentanyl is fueling a historic rate of addiction and overdose deaths across the country.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/08 DOJ: Beijing scheme to spy on activists
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/07/08/DHS-employees-charged-China-espionage/3861657263728/

GIST

July 8 (UPI) -- A federal grand jury in Brooklyn has charged two men connected to the Department of Homeland Security on accusations of being involved in a scheme organized by Beijing to spy on and harass pro-democracy activists in the United States.

The Justice Department identified the two men Thursday in [a statement](#) as [Craig Miller](#), a 15-year employee with the department who is based in Minnesota, and Derrick Taylor, a retired DHS law enforcement agent currently working as a private investigator in Irvine, Calif.

The grand jury returned the superseding indictment Wednesday charging five people, including the two DHS employees and three others who [were previously charged in March](#) on allegations of "perpetrating a transnational repression scheme that targeted U.S. residents whose political views and actions are disfavored by the PRC government," the Justice Department said. The People's Republic of China is the official name of China.

"This case involves a multifaceted campaign to silence, harass, discredit and spy on U.S. residents for exercising their freedom of speech -- aided by a current federal law enforcement officer and a private investigator who provided confidential information about U.S. residents from a restricted law enforcement database, and when confronted about their improper conduct, they lied and destroyed evidence," said U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York.

According to court documents, Qiang "Jason" Sun, 40, of China, directed Fan "Frank" Liu, 62, of Jericho, N.Y., and Matthew Ziburis, 49, of Oyster Bay, N.Y., to discredit pro-democracy Chinese dissidents living in the United States by disseminating negative information about them.

The indictment states unnamed co-conspirators under Liu hired Taylor to obtain personal identification information on multiple Chinese citizens living in the United States. Prosecutors said Taylor then tasked two DHS officers, including Miller, to obtain passport information and photos as well as flight and [immigration](#) records on the targets from a restricted database.

On receiving that information, Taylor then shared it with Liu's co-conspirators. That information was then used by Liu, Ziburis and Sun to target and harass the U.S. residents, the court document states.

According to [the criminal complaint](#), Miller and Taylor also lied about their actions to the FBI and attempted to destroy evidence.

Prosecutors accuse Miller of deleting text messages he sent Taylor from his smartphone amid interview with the FBI, while Taylor directed an unnamed co-conspirator to not hand over evidence to the U.S. government.

"When interviewed by the FBI, Taylor falsely claimed that he obtained the records in question from a friend who was using the 'Black Dark Web' -- likely a reference to the dark web," the Justice Department said.

Miller and Taylor have been charged with obstruction of justice while Taylor also faces charges of making a false statement to the FBI.

If convicted Taylor faces up to 25 years' imprisonment while Miller faces up to 20 years' imprisonment.

"Actions taken by the defendants -- two of which are current or former federal law enforcement officers -- demonstrate how the PRC seeks to stalk, intimidate and silence those who oppose it," Assistant Director Alan Kohler Jr. of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division said. "The FBI battles transnational repression because it is an evil in its own right, and an assault on the freedoms of an open society."

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HEADLINE 07/07 Judge orders Mexican cartel to pay \$1.5B

SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/us-judge-orders-mexican-cartel-to-pay-billions-for-killings/2022/07/07/6f51d034-fe48-11ec-b39d-71309168014b_story.html
GIST	<p>BISMARCK, N.D. — A Mexican drug cartel accused in the gruesome killings of nine women and children from an offshoot Mormon community must pay \$1.5 billion to the families, a federal judge from North Dakota ruled.</p> <p>The family members of the victims filed a lawsuit accusing the Juarez cartel of carrying out the November 2019 attack in Mexico as retribution for their public criticism and protests against the cartel. Cartel members fired hundreds of rounds of ammunition into vehicles and then set them on fire. Mexican authorities said in 2020 that the mastermind of the attack was one of 17 people arrested.</p> <p>U.S. Magistrate Judge Clare Hochhalter’s award will be automatically tripled under federal Anti-Terrorism Act, increasing the amount to \$4.6 billion. The government can freeze assets of terrorist organizations, but it’s unclear if the U.S. Treasury Department holds any cartel assets.</p> <p>The Bismarck Tribune reported that the cartel did not respond to a published summons or have representation at a trial in North Dakota in March.</p> <p>The surviving family members include two widowers of women killed who were working in North Dakota at the time the suit was filed. Their lawyer said various family members were living in the state and working in the oil industry while traveling back and forth to Mexico.</p> <p>“We went into a United States courtroom in North Dakota seeking some acknowledgement of and measure of justice for the trauma inflicted on our family and we received it,” said David Langford, the husband of one of the victims.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Mexico ‘hugs not bullets’ strategy shift?
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/epzxn/amlo-cartel-strategy-gun-fights
GIST	<p>A tense standoff between Mexico’s army and cartel henchmen took place when the troops detained a regional cartel boss earlier this week. The soldiers refused to free Francisco Torres, “El Duranguillo”, in Altar, Sonora, and an hourlong gunfight ensued, which ended up with one man dead and four soldiers wounded.</p> <p>Footage of the July 2 incident, taken by local residents and security cameras, showed a group of around 60 men blocking the roads with pick-up trucks and shooting at the soldiers.</p> <p>President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said in a press conference Tuesday that men offered the soldiers 10 million pesos (around half a million dollars) to let Torres go. They refused. A number of recent shootouts and arrests in Mexico are prompting some to ask if the president is backtracking on his promise to use hugs, not bullets, to bring down drug-trafficking and the violence around it.</p> <p>Another confrontation took place on the same day, this one between armed groups after an attempt on the life of Luis Edgar Herrera “El Tolín”, allegedly a boss for a faction of the Sinaloa Cartel in the northern cities of Mexicali and Rosarito in the state of Baja California, according to local press reports.</p> <p>When Herrera took his five-year-old son - who was allegedly injured in the exchange - to hospital he got into another gunfight with the Mexican Army and Baja California State Police before being arrested, authorities said.</p> <p>The latest, anti-narco operations in Mexico have become rare under Mexico’s President López Obrador, who vowed to use “hugs not bullets” to defeat organized crime when he came into power in 2018. But homicides continue to soar in Mexico, and the president is perceived by some as letting the cartels get away with murder. López Obrador was also criticized for shaking the hand of ‘El Chapo’s’ mother, María Consuelo Loera during the first Covid lockdown in Mexico.</p>

Following the two arrests on July 2, Mexican authorities detained a third cartel boss in the space of two days—this time it was Neri Ramírez “El Neri”, an alleged capo in the Mexican coastal city of Guaymas, Sonora. Authorities said [Ramírez is behind several dozens of killings](#) in the region.

Operations by the armed forces against prominent cartel members have been rare since an incident known as the Culiacanazo in October 2019. Government forces detained but then were forced to release Ovidio Guzmán, the son of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán in the Sinaloa capital, after they were outnumbered and outgunned by cartel henchmen. The incident was seen as an embarrassment for the government of López Obrador.

The arrests this weekend point to a shift, according to security analyst Eduardo Guerrero, founder of intelligence firm Lantia.

“López Obrador is having an important change of strategy and actually engaging in security operatives using force,” Guerrero told VICE World News.

Guerrero noted that most of the recent apprehensions have been against a single cartel.

“Up until last year the Mexican government was very much focused on fighting New Generation Jalisco Cartel, but starting this year the majority of the attacks have been against the Sinaloa Cartel,” he said.

If the U.S. is pressing Mexico’s government to go hard against the Sinaloa Cartel, it comes at a time when diplomatic relations in anti-narcotics operations between the two nations are at a low.

Earlier this year, [Mexico’s government shut down an elite police unit](#) that was trained and funded by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to investigate drug cartels, claiming it was corrupt. It also [removed a DEA plane](#) from its territory.

Matters began to go downhill in October 2020, when Mexico’s former Defense Chief General Salvador Cienfuegos was arrested on a trip to the U.S on charges that he worked with drug-traffickers. The move caused a diplomatic spat, and President [López Obrador](#) threatened to throw the DEA out of Mexico. The U.S backtracked, dropped the charges and sent Cienfuegos home. [He was not charged with a crime in Mexico.](#)

“The U.S. has targeted the Sinaloa Cartel as a priority for being the criminal organization exporting the vast majority of the fentanyl found,” Guerrero said.

Arrests also make the government look like it’s taking important measures, said another analyst. “The apprehension of a kingpin always results in a better perception from the people to the government in place, but this government has made it clear they are not going against the biggest leaders,” analyst Alejandro Hope [told El País newspaper](#) in a recent interview.

Guerrero said that the pressure is on. “The Mexican government is finding itself forced to act because the insecurity in Mexico is now affecting everyone, all social classes, it is very widespread at this point.”

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HEADLINE	07/08 Former Japan PM fatally shot during speech
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/07/japan-shinzo-abe-shot-nara-attack/
GIST	<p>TOKYO — Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a towering political figure at home and abroad, died after being shot at a campaign event Friday, public broadcaster NHK said, shocking a nation where firearms laws are among the world’s strictest and gun violence is rare.</p> <p>Abe, 67, was stumbling for a fellow politician from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in Nara, near Osaka, on Friday morning when a gunman wielding what police described as a homemade weapon fired</p>

two shots. Abe sustained injuries to his neck and chest, police sources told Japanese media, and was rushed to the hospital in critical condition.

Hidetada Fukushima, the head of emergency center at the Nara Medical University Hospital, confirmed later in the day that Abe had died. Abe arrived at the hospital at 12:20 p.m. Friday without vital signs, doctors said. They attempted to resuscitate him and gave blood transfusions to stop his rapid bleeding, Fukushima said.

The assassination of Japan's longest-serving prime minister, and a staunch U.S. ally, sent shockwaves throughout the country ahead of elections for the upper house of parliament on Sunday.

Police arrested a suspect, a man from Nara in his 40s named Tetsuya Yamagami, and seized a gun. Yamagami was a member of the Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces for three years, defense officials told Japanese media.

Footage of the event showed Abe giving a speech, then a plume of smoke forming behind him as he collapsed. Officials ran to apprehend the shooter, who appeared to be positioned behind Abe. Videos showed a chaotic scene with Abe, unmoving, lying on the ground as attendees yelled for an ambulance.

He was taken to the Nara Medical University Hospital but died hours later.

Abe, who came from a prominent political family, was the youngest person to become prime minister of postwar Japan. His popularity soared after he resigned from office in 2020, and he remained a power-broker who frequented campaign events to support other LDP politicians.

At an emotional news conference Friday before Abe's death, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declined to describe the motive of the shooter, saying there was not enough information to share.

"This is a despicable and barbaric act that occurred in the midst of an election which is the foundation of democracy and absolutely cannot be tolerated. We condemn it in the harshest possible terms," said Kishida, who appeared close to tears.

No decision had been made about whether to change the election date, Kishida said. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said cabinet members campaigning for this weekend's polls had been asked to return to Tokyo.

Japanese media reported that the suspect had told police that he was frustrated with Abe and aimed at the former conservative leader with the intent to kill him.

Abe oversaw a period of relative stability as prime minister from 2012 to 2020, raising Japan's global image and emphasizing a strong alliance with the United States, even as former U.S. president Donald Trump tested long-standing relationships with allies.

Abe focused on reviving Japan's stagnating economy through a package dubbed "Abenomics," and sought to expand Japan's military defenses. Controversially, he tried to modify the country's pacifist postwar constitution and continued to push for Japan to increase its defensive capabilities, most recently suggesting Japan should discuss a nuclear "sharing" program similar to NATO members after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Earlier, he led the country from 2006 to 2007 but stepped down because of chronic ulcerative colitis, the same condition that led to his resignation in 2020.

Foreign leaders expressed sympathies as they reacted with horror to the events in Nara.

	<p>In a statement before Abe's death, the White House said it was "shocked and saddened to hear about the violent attack." "We are closely monitoring the reports and keeping our thoughts with his family and the people of Japan," it said.</p> <p>China's Foreign Ministry extended condolences to his family. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said Abe was "not only my good friend, but also Taiwan's most staunch friend." British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was "utterly appalled and saddened." Indian leader Narendra Modi said he was "deeply distressed."</p> <p>The last time a Japanese politician was similarly attacked like Abe was in 1992, when LDP member and deputy prime minister Shin Kanemaru was attacked by a gunman, but was not injured.</p> <p>Kishida, who was campaigning in Yamagata when the shooting occurred, canceled his campaign schedule Friday and headed back to Tokyo.</p> <p>Firearms are strictly regulated in Japan, and gun violence is most often associated with the yakuza, the Japanese criminal network. Last year, eight of the 10 shootings in Japan were related to the yakuza, according to the National Police Agency, resulting in one death and four injuries.</p> <p>Anyone trying to obtain a gun in Japan needs to apply for a permit, attend a class on gun safety and laws, and pass a written test. There is a full-day training course on safe shooting and practicing techniques. There are multiple rounds of checks and verification on the gun owner's background and health, including information about their family, mental health, personal debt, and criminal record. The gun must be registered with and inspected by police.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Ukraine uncovers, foils sex trafficking ring
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jul/07/ukraine-prosecutors-uncover-sex-trafficking-ring-preying-on-women-fleeing-country
GIST	<p>Investigators in Ukraine said they had foiled a criminal gang who forced women into sex work abroad after luring them with false adverts for legitimate employment.</p> <p>Authorities in Kyiv arrested the suspected leader of the gang after months of surveillance resulted in them stopping a woman as she was about to cross the border. They were then able to confirm the suspect's involvement.</p> <p>The 21-year-old, who has a son to support, had lost her job because of the war and was about to cross into Hungary, travel on to Vienna and, from there, board a flight for Istanbul, where she believed a legitimate job offer waited for her.</p> <p>After assisting her, prosecutors were then able to arrest a 31-year-old male suspected of being the leader of a trafficking ring. Based in the Kyiv region, the gang allegedly recruited a number of vulnerable Ukrainian women after the Russian invasion with the false prospect of a legal job, sent them to Turkey and forced them into sex work.</p> <p>In the suspect's home, prosecutors found thousands of dollars in cash, credit cards, some registered in China, and a diary, seen by the Guardian, in which the suspect kept a record of the women and their activity in Turkey.</p> <p>"Since the beginning of the war a lot of women in Ukraine bear financial hardship," said Oleh Tkalenko, a senior prosecutor for the Kyiv region who led the investigation. "A lot of them lost their jobs. It was very hard, especially for single mothers. In one of the towns in the Kyiv region, a group of men organised a series of Telegram channels, called 'Meetings', 'Meet your future husband' or 'Escort service' where they recruited these women. Preying on their vulnerable situation, they were offering them jobs in Turkey."</p>

Prosecutors said that women were offered work accompanying wealthy men to prestigious events. “When the women got there, they were involved in prostitution,” said Tkalenko. “They were scammed.”

In early June, investigators began tracking the movements and contacts of a man living near the capital who appeared to be the ringleader. After a few weeks, the authorities managed to trace one of his victims, a woman from Donetsk who had been living in Kyiv and was making her way to the border village of Chop, on to Hungary, then Austria where she would board the flight for Istanbul.

“With the detectives, we decided to intervene,” said Tkalenko. “We stopped the woman at the border. Her vulnerable condition was clear: absence of money, a child to support, overall financial difficulties because of the war. The ringleader we were surveilling had bought her tickets, given her some money and organised her route. At that point, we arrested the man and searched his so-called ‘office’, where we found irrefutable evidence.”

The man allegedly kept records of the women in Turkey in a notebook. Under their real names or nicknames he had listed their work days, and a price list for each service.

At the moment, prosecutors do not know how many women were forced into sex work and sent to Turkey and allegedly other countries in the EU. At least 10 women’s names were listed in the ringleader’s notebook.

“Men and women in Ukraine in this period can be vulnerable to labour and sexual exploitation,” said Varvara Zhluktenko, communications officer at the UN’s International Organization for Migration in Ukraine. “We have a hotline that has been operating for many years to provide assistance to victims of human trafficking. Since the beginning of the war, we have cases of Ukrainian women who are looking for accommodation abroad in EU member states and they are communicating to potential hosts over the internet while they are still in Ukraine.

“We had a case of a flat owner living in Europe who told a woman that she could stay at his place in exchange for sex. There are also men who present themselves as travel agents and push Ukrainian women to go with them in order to leave the country, and they are insisting like this is the last chance for them to leave Ukraine, which is very suspicious.”

Tkalenko said: “Based on the evidence collected, we suspect that there are more women being exploited in Turkey at the moment. There are records in the man’s notebook. We are now getting ready to cooperate with our Turkish colleagues.”

Prosecutors said the woman stopped at the border is cooperating with the authorities and is prepared to testify against the gang leader and his associates.

Since the Russian invasion, human rights organisations said women and child refugees fleeing Ukraine to Poland are being targeted by suspected sex traffickers, operating alone and in gangs.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Month of shootings: one on top of another
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/07/07/us/mass-shootings-us.html
GIST	<p>In a Buffalo supermarket, 10 people died. In a Texas elementary school, the fatality count was 19 students and two teachers. Those were the mass shootings, only 10 days apart, that attracted global attention in May — but there were many others that passed in a quick staccato, devastating families and communities but streaming past everyone else in a blur. They seemed to fade from the headlines in days, having become too frequent, too dismal, too commonplace to absorb.</p> <p>In the same month there were mass shootings at a Taiwanese church luncheon in California, a flea market in Houston, a nightlife district in Milwaukee, a park in Lexington, Ky., and a high school graduation in Hot Springs, Ark., to name only a few.</p>

Rarely did these episodes involve a heavily armed lone gunman like the one who fired dozens of shots from a rooftop at an Independence Day parade in Highland Park, Ill., killing seven people. Rampage shootings get the most scrutiny, but they account for only a tiny proportion of gun violence victims. Lesser-known episodes often were just as random, just as public and just as scarring for those affected.

There is no single definition of a mass shooting — it can be targeted or indiscriminate, based on number of deaths alone or injuries as well. Some researchers, like those at the Gun Violence Archive, count any shooting with four or more people wounded or killed; others begin at four fatalities. Some researchers count what the F.B.I. calls “active shooters” or “mass public shootings” separately from gang or drug-related violence or domestic “family annihilators.”

However these episodes are defined, they are on the rise in the United States — so much so that horrific events that might once have dominated the news now slip quickly out of the public eye. In Phoenix, the police have had very little to say about a shooting episode, reportedly outside a house party, that left one teenager dead and five others wounded. In Goshen, Ind., almost no details have been released about a gunman who shot a family of four siblings in their home, killing one, who was 17.

And that was just in May, during which the Gun Violence Archive counted 63 mass shootings; a small number.... The archive counted 65 mass shootings in June, and 25 already this month, as of July 7.

In Buffalo, Zeneta Everhart’s son is still healing from injuries after being shot at the supermarket by a gunman who the authorities say was motivated to kill Black people. “For too long, we’ve always just gone, ‘These things happen — now there’s another one, so we’ll move on,’” Ms. Everhart said. “We all need to keep talking about this.”

...Researchers have found that a majority of mass shootings are linked to domestic violence. Looking at 110 shootings that resulted in four or more fatalities, a 2021 study at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions found that [almost 60 percent were cases of domestic violence](#), and in another 9 percent the perpetrator had a history of domestic violence. A woman is [six times as likely](#) to be killed by an abuser if there is a gun in the home...

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HEADLINE	07/07 Brittney Griner pleads guilty in Russia court
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/07/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#brittney-griner-trial
GIST	<p>The detained American basketball star Brittney Griner pleaded guilty to drug charges in a court near Moscow on Thursday, her lawyer said.</p> <p>“I’d like to plead guilty, your honor. But there was no intent. I didn’t want to break the law,” Ms. Griner said in English, which was then translated into Russian, Reuters reported.</p> <p>Ms. Griner has been detained in Russia since Feb. 17, accused by the Russian authorities of having a vape cartridge with hashish oil in her luggage at an airport near Moscow.</p> <p>Aleksandr Boikov, her lawyer, said cartridges appeared in Ms. Griner’s luggage “because of carelessness.” “She pleaded guilty, stressing that she was carrying substances prohibited in Russia unintentionally, because she was packing in a hurry,” Mr. Boikov said.</p> <p>If Ms. Griner is convicted, she could face up to 10 years in a Russian penal colony. Ms. Griner still faces formal conviction and sentencing proceedings, and her next day in court is scheduled to be July 14.</p> <p>“Considering the nature of her case, the insignificant amount of the substance and B.G.’s personality and history of positive contributions to global and Russian sport, the defense hopes that the plea will be considered by the court as a mitigating factor and there will be no severe sentence,” Ms. Griner’s legal team in Russia said in a statement on Thursday.</p>

Her guilty plea came hours after a top Russian diplomat lashed out at the Biden administration for trying to “foment hype” around her case.

The Russian diplomat, Sergei A. Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, said that the publicity around the case was not helping Ms. Griner, who American officials say is essentially a hostage taken by President Vladimir V. Putin in the run-up to the war in Ukraine.

Mr. Ryabkov indicated that Moscow would be prepared to negotiate her fate, but only after the court reached a verdict on the drug charges that were brought against her.

“We have a long-established form of discussing these matters,” Mr. Ryabkov told reporters on Thursday in Moscow, according to the Interfax news agency. “The American side’s attempts to foment hype and make noise in the public environment are understandable, but they don’t help to practically resolve issues.”

After her [trial began last week](#), Ms. Griner [sent a handwritten letter](#) to Mr. Biden asking him not to “forget about” her and other American detainees overseas.

Mr. Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris spoke on Wednesday with Ms. Griner’s wife, Cherelle Griner, [according to a statement](#) released by the White House.

During the call, the statement said, the president read a draft of a letter that he planned to send to Brittney Griner. He also said that his administration was pursuing “every avenue to bring Brittney home.”

Speaking outside the courtroom on Thursday, Elizabeth Rood, the chargé d’affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, said she had spoken to Ms. Griner and she had been able to read the president’s letter.

“She said that she’s eating well, she’s able to read books, and under the circumstances, she’s doing well,” Ms. Rood said, according to a video posted on Twitter by an NPR correspondent. She added: “I would like again to emphasize the commitment of the U.S. government at the very highest level to bring home safely Ms. Griner and all U.S. citizens wrongfully detained.”

Cherelle Griner has [publicly expressed frustration with Mr. Biden](#) and his administration’s efforts to secure her wife’s release.

In a statement to The New York Times on Wednesday, Cherelle Griner said she was grateful to Mr. Biden and Ms. Harris “for the time they spent with me and for the commitment they expressed to getting B.G. home.”

The United States government has classified Brittney Griner as “[wrongfully detained](#)” and is working to secure her release regardless of the outcome of the trial. While the Kremlin claims it has no involvement in Ms. Griner’s case, Russian state media reports have indicated that Moscow may press the United States to free a Russian in American custody — like the [convicted arms dealer Viktor Bout](#) — in exchange for her freedom.

Mr. Ryabkov said that until the conclusion of Ms. Griner’s case, “there are no formal procedural grounds” to discuss further steps. He hinted, however, that Moscow was interested in negotiating over her fate, claiming that she would be helped by “a serious reading by the American side of the signals that they received from Russia, from Moscow, through specialized channels.”

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HEADLINE	07/07 Another mass shooting, bracing for more
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220707-another-mass-shooting-leaves-u-s-bracing-for-more
GIST	This week’s Independence Day massacre in a Chicago suburb is highlighting the challenge now facing U.S. law enforcement and homeland security officials — an environment in which almost any public event could come under attack with few, if any, signals for authorities to detect in advance.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has been warning for months of a “dynamic and complex” threat environment, most recently in a National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin last month, cautioning a variety of factors from personal grievances to current events could spark the next attack, with public gatherings a likely target.

Yet even armed with that knowledge, authorities were not able to see any signs or find any evidence that might have allowed them to stop the mass shooting at the Highland Park, Illinois July Fourth parade which killed seven people and wounded at least 30 others.

“The shooting appears to be completely random,” Chris Covelli, a spokesperson for the Lake County sheriff’s office, told reporters Tuesday.

“We have no information to suggest at this point it was racially motivated, motivated by religion or any other protected status,” he said.

What investigators are finding, however, is a trail of evidence, mostly on social media, that suggests the suspect, 21-year-old Robert Crimo III, was veering toward violence.

Crimo, an aspiring musician with the stage name Awake the Rapper, recently posted videos and songs, some ominous and violent, on social media sites.

Officials said Crimo had also been brought to the attention of police twice — in April 2019 for an attempted suicide and in September of that same year for threatening family members.

Additionally, law enforcement officials said it appears Crimo was planning the attack on the parade for weeks, buying a rifle, picking out a location and planning an escape.

So how did the Crimo fly under the radar?

Some terrorism and security experts point out the suspect did not appear to subscribe to any sort of easily recognizable ideology.

“While it’s too early to say what motivated the Highland shooter, his scattered online profile certainly points to his presence in some disturbingly violent and nihilistic spaces,” according to Amarnath Amarasingam, a terrorism researcher at Queen’s University School of Religion in Ontario, Canada.

“A lot of quite obscure internet subcultures are pushing young people towards the breaking point,” Amarasingam told VOA. “These spaces are deliberately designed to disconnect individuals from reality, lower their inhibitions to engage in violence.”

Additionally, Amarasingham warned these sites push individuals “to see incoherence and nonsense as virtuous.”

It is a culture than can be confounding.

“Traditional extremism frameworks have a hard time with this because we are trained to demand a level of coherence in ideologies. This is not that,” Amarasingham said. “People who look at his attendance at Trump rallies and so on are going to miss a major piece of this story.

In a statement Tuesday, U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas described the attack on the Highland Park July Fourth parade as “yet another mass shooting” and promised his department would redouble its efforts to prevent future tragedies.

“The security of our homeland requires more,” Mayorkas said in a statement. “It requires all of us, together, to address the epidemic of targeted gun violence, including the development and implementation of new community-based models of prevention and intervention.”

What federal government officials, whether at the Department of Homeland Security or other agencies, can do about access to guns is unclear, especially after last month's Supreme Court ruling, which struck down a New York State gun control law as unconstitutional.

For now, Homeland Security officials say they will focus on efforts like the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, which provides financial resources and other assistance to communities across the country to help stop young people from radicalizing.

U.S. states are also offering help to local communities.

The New Jersey office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) told VOA it routinely "tracks events and works closely with communities, organizers and venues to help prevent, mitigate and respond to any potential threats."

"We encourage interfaith communities, businesses and the general public to connect with their local law enforcement," the NJOHSP added in an email. "These partnerships are better forged prior to any potential crises unfolding."

There are concerns, however, that such programs are not enough.

"There is a resistance in general, either from kind of an ideological perspective, in some cases because of historical mistrust of what the federal government has been doing," said Sam Lichtenstein, director of analysis at the Risk Assistance Network and Exchange, also known as RANE.

"But even in communities that are more receptive to some of these things you can have as many local authorities that are interested and eager to participate as you want, but if it doesn't really filter down to the really local grass roots, which is the hardest thing to do, it's unlikely to really be successful," he told VOA.

There are also doubts about the reliability of counting on Americans to report concerns — and then getting needed help for those trending towards violence.

"What's tragic here [in Highland Park] and what you see in a lot of these incidents is that now we all look back and we find some proverbial red flags," said RANE's Lichtenstein.

"Violent, inciteful rhetoric is becoming normalized in society and that is most definitely making it harder to pull out what's really concerning from social media and other statements," he said. "For many people, even if they hear concerning things, it doesn't immediately kind of trigger for them, 'Oh, I should be reporting this.'"

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HEADLINE	07/07 Puget Sound auto thefts up nearly double
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/auto-thefts-puget-sound-nearly-double-year-over-year/XEWS3GPAQBFTPJDALGJGNDZZXM/
GIST	<p>Vehicle thefts around Puget Sound have nearly doubled year-over-year, according to statistics released by Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force.</p> <p>In June 2022, there were 729 reported stolen vehicles in Pierce County, up from a reported 250 to 300 in 2020 and 2021.</p> <p>In King County, there were a reported 1,244 stolen vehicles in June 2022, up from about 800 stolen vehicles in 2020 and 2021.</p> <p>Across the state, vehicle thefts peaked in March 2022, with about 4,200 reported, over double the vehicle thefts in March 2020.</p>

	In Pierce County alone, during the weekend of July 2 and 3, there were a reported 43 stolen vehicles, with a mix of vehicle types and methods of theft.
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HEADLINE	07/07 Teens arrested: shooting death of 14yr-old
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/teen-arrested-shooting-girl-hilltop-tacoma/281-cfbddcae-dd9c-478c-8cc9-12059b937bc5
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Two 17-year-old male suspects were arrested Thursday for their alleged involvement in the shooting and killing a 14-year-old girl in Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood.</p> <p>The suspects were each booked on a charge of first-degree murder.</p> <p>One suspect was taken into custody around 4 p.m. The second turned himself in to Remann Hall around 6:45 p.m.</p> <p>According to the Tacoma Police Department, a group of juveniles was inside a car in the area of South 19th Street and MLK Jr Way Wednesday when someone shot at them. Police said a 14-year-old girl, identified as Iyana Ussery, who was inside the vehicle was struck by the gunfire.</p> <p>Police said the victims drove the car to the 1900 block of South Ainsworth and called for medical help. Responding officers gave Iyana life-saving measures, but she was pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>The investigation into the shooting continues.</p> <p>Meanwhile, a peace walk was held Thursday evening in Hilltop, where more than 100 people mourned the teen and expressed their frustration. Alongside community members, Tacoma Police Chief Avery Moore, Mayor Victoria Woodards, state Sen. T'wina Nobles, and Rep. Derek Kilmer were in attendance.</p> <p>"Are we failing our young people as adults and leaders in our community?" asked Brendan Nelson with Peace Lutheran Church.</p> <p>Nelson was mentoring a group of young people when the car full of juveniles pulled up.</p> <p>"To see that, we had been talking about trauma and how we can be grateful and thankful for things when there's so much chaos in the world, and then we come back to a life lost, here in our neighborhood," Nelson said.</p> <p>Now Nelson has to begin the work of trying to make sense of a tragedy that hit so close to home.</p> <p>"For them to actually see it, to know that there's a young person laying on the ground just steps away from them, is really difficult," Nelson said.</p> <p>Terrance Turner of Tacoma Cease Fire, which organized the peace walk, is calling on everyone in the community to stand against the violence. His hopes were that young people would attend the event.</p> <p>"It's a shared community, so it's a shared responsibility and they have an integral role that they do play and they can start by showing up today and say we're tired of little kids getting killed and nothing happening," he said. "It doesn't matter how many marches we do, nothing's bringing that child back, period, so what can we do different from this event is really where it's at."</p> <p>Representatives for Iyana's family spoke on their behalf. They described her as a "peacemaker" and "always trying to pull the family together."</p>

	<p>One of Iyana's friends, who said they were there when the shooting occurred, said, "Before Iyana passed away, the last thing she did was smile at me."</p> <p>Iyana's death marks the 25th homicide in Tacoma so far in 2022.</p> <p>Police Chief Avery Moore put out a statement on the shooting, saying in part, that "the murder of a child rips at the very foundation of our community, and no child should fear their community, nor should any parent have to bury a child."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Food bank ransacked over holiday weekend
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/white-center-food-bank-damage/281-ba1064a2-0f97-41b3-b55f-6a47fa8c5217
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Staff at the White Center Food Bank say someone broke into their offices and did significant damage over the holiday weekend.</p> <p>Carmen Smith, the executive director of the White Center Food Bank, said they are still processing the break-in.</p> <p>“You’ll see a lot of bees sleeping in flowers – it’s really kind of a magical space – it saddens me a little bit that someone wanted to disrupt it,” Smith said.</p> <p>That space was violated when someone over the weekend busted open the door and preceded to ransack the food bank's offices. They estimate \$7,000 in damages were done.</p> <p>“You would hope that the food bank would be one of those safe, untouchable places,” Smith said.</p> <p>Despite the break-in, their work didn’t stop.</p> <p>“We’re responsible to the community that we serve and so we always put them first and we’ve done so over the whole pandemic and I think that’s part of what makes this harder too,” Smith continued.</p> <p>The pandemic still taking its toll. Their numbers show that in May they served 7200 people – that’s two thousand more clients that the same time in 2019.</p> <p>That’s a lot of people. That’s a lot of food but we’re pretty proud that we’ve been able to manage the food supply really well, we haven’t run out of food we haven’t had to turn anyone away that’s come to us and that’s what’s important,” Smith said.</p> <p>The community they serve seeing the importance too. In the days since the breaking they’ve seen donations pour in from across western Washington. A reminder that their work matters as the challenges keep coming.</p> <p>“Formula is still hard to find, food is more expensive for us and that is part of the reason that we’re seeing more people is that everything is more expensive,” Smith said.</p> <p>The break in is simply the latest reminder that their work never stops.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/07 Seattle Proud Boy reveals self in indictment
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/seattle-proud-boy-reveals-he-was-in-chapter-alleged-to-have-planned-jan-6-insurrection/
GIST	<p>A Washington state man says he is the unnamed person referenced in the seditious conspiracy case the federal government is pursuing against members of the Proud Boys for their actions at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.</p>

Robert Fussell, of Seattle, revealed his identity and role because, he said, evidence cited by federal prosecutors is being mischaracterized. Should the entire private chat logs of the senior Proud Boys planning council be publicized, it would undermine the government's case, he said.

Fussell, who uses the pseudonym Rex Fergus, is referenced in an indictment as one of three members of "upper-tier leadership" of the Proud Boys' "Ministry of Self-Defense," which allegedly planned the group's actions on Jan. 6. He is not named in the indictment, as he has not been charged with any crime.

The other two leaders of the "operations council" are Zach Rehl, of Philadelphia, who is charged with seditious conspiracy, and another unnamed senior member referred to as "Person 3," whom LNP | LancasterOnline identified in March as John Charles Stewart, of Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

The Ministry of Self-Defense chats play a key role in the government's case against the Proud Boys, receiving more than a dozen mentions in the indictment. Prosecutors have highlighted one message in the chat in particular, where a Proud Boys leader allegedly said they want to "storm the Capitol." But Fussell disputes the characterization of the chat the Department of Justice is relying on.

Fussell revealed his role to reporters from LNP | LancasterOnline and The Seattle Times in two interviews last week. Leaked Proud Boys chats on the social media app Telegram, which have been independently authenticated for this story, confirm Fussell's role.

"All of these federal agencies have copies of Mossad chat, everything that was said," said Fussell, who says he was not at the Jan. 6 rally because his flight was canceled. (Internally, the Proud Boys refer to the Ministry of Self-Defense with the abbreviation MOSD, pronounced "Mossad," which is also the name of the Israeli intelligence agency.)

"Even just having these chats is not enough — they know it and we know it — to prosecute us. There's nothing in the chats that says anything about going into the Capitol on Jan. 6."

Fussell said that MOSD was set up as a way to protect members at national rallies after a series of violent incidents, including the stabbing of North Carolina Proud Boy Jeremy Bertino in December 2020.

The Mossad chats are being viewed as a "smoking gun" by the Department of Justice, Fussell said, maintaining that the context of the full chats — which the department has — prove there was no prior intent to storm the Capitol.

One of the three Proud Boys chats at the heart of the Department of Justice's case was posted online Sunday by a Florida Proud Boy, Gabriel Garcia, who also faces charges for his role in the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. LNP | LancasterOnline confirmed their authenticity with Aaron Wolkind, a Philadelphia Proud Boy who was included in the chats and is referenced in the indictment as an unindicted co-conspirator.

Unredacted transcripts of the chat — where prospective MOSD members were introduced — confirm Fussell's role, as well as Stewart's, but do not contain some of the most pertinent statements to the Department of Justice's seditious conspiracy case.

For example, in the still-unreleased third chat among leaders of the group, investigators point to an exchange between Stewart and former Proud Boys President Enrique Tarrio as evidence of the group's prior intent to violently disrupt Congress' certification of Joe Biden's 2020 presidential win.

In a Jan. 3, 2021, message, Stewart recommended that Proud Boys focus their efforts on the U.S. House of Representatives, where Congress would be meeting in joint session to certify the election results.

Tarrio responded to the message with, "You want to storm the Capitol."

“When you look at the context of the conversation that’s being had, it was basically like, ‘You moron — we’re not going into the Capitol,’ ” Fussell said.

Fussell said the response to Tarrio’s message from others in the group indicated they knew Tarrio was not serious, though Fussell declined to provide the full chat logs and said in a text message to The Seattle Times that he had “decided to hold on to the information that I have until the time comes that I can best help the J6 guys’ cases in court.”

Samantha Kutner, an extremism researcher focused on the Proud Boys whose work has been published by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, said that in studying the group, she has found that even if one individual Proud Boy is not violent, the group as a whole is.

She said the group’s tactics often involve provoking others into confrontation and then releasing video of themselves appearing as victims, as well as inducing non-Proud Boys to take action, or “rile up the normies.”

Fussell and Wolkind, though, said that there was no coordinated plan and that prosecutors are attempting to win in the court of public opinion.

“I think a lot of it was guys caught up in the moment,” Fussell said. “I believe if Enrique Tarrio had been standing in front of those steps with all those Proud Boys, he would not have let them go in.”

The U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack has scheduled its next public hearing for 7 a.m. PDT on Tuesday. The hearing is expected to explore the role the Proud Boys and other groups played that day, as well as any advance knowledge the Trump White House may have had of their plans.

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HEADLINE	07/07 Mass shooter passed 4 background checks
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-determined-highland-park-shooting-suspect-posed-clear/story?id=86421734
GIST	<p>Highland Park Police Department three years ago determined that the alleged Fourth of July massacre suspect posed "clear and present danger" after a family member claimed he was threatening to "kill everyone," a newly released police record shows.</p> <p>The record is part of a series of police documents released Thursday that detail Highland Park shooting suspect Robert "Bobby" Crimo III's troubled past and family turmoil, including an incident in which he threatened to "kill everyone" in the house in September 2019, just months before he went through background checks in his application for a firearm owner identification card.</p> <p>The police reports confirm Lake County Sheriff's Sgt. Christopher Covelli's revelation during a Tuesday press conference that Crimo was approved for a gun license despite the two troubling run-ins with police that apparently did not surface in his background checks.</p> <p>Highland Park police, which responded to the call in September 2019, removed a 24-inch Samurai blade, a box containing a 12-inch dagger and 16 hand knives from Crimo's house that day, according to an incident report. Crimo told the police that he was depressed and had a history of drug use, the incident report shows. He also told the police that he had no intention of harming himself or others, according to the report.</p> <p>No charges were filed in the incident when his family declined to press charges, Covelli said.</p> <p>But the incident, labeled "well-being check," prompted Highland Park police to file a report titled "Person Determined to Pose a Clear and Present Danger" on Crimo, which states Crimo is identified as a person "who, if granted access to a firearm or firearm ammunition, pose an actual, imminent threat of substantial</p>

bodily harm to themselves or another person(s) that is articulable and significant or who will likely act in a manner dangerous to public interest."

According to the record, the "Clear and Present Danger form" was faxed to the Illinois State Police.

The revelations from the newly released records raise further questions about whether the incident should have prevented the alleged shooter from obtaining firearms.

Crimo had already had a police encounter earlier that year in late April, when an unnamed caller reported an alleged suicide attempt with a machete by Crimo a week before, another Highland Park police incident report shows.

The police noted in the incident report that the alleged suicide attempt had already been "handled by mental health professionals" the previous week and that no threats of harm were made by Crimo against himself or others that day.

In an interview with ABC News, the suspect's father, Robert Crimo Jr., alleges he was not aware of his son's alleged suicide attempt, but the incident report indicates that both parents were at the location when police were called a week after the alleged attempt. A source close to the matter told ABC News the report is incorrect and Crimo Jr. was not present for the police call.

"I'm not aware -- I'm not aware of that one," Crimo Jr. said. "You know, we live -- we live in separate households."

Despite the two alarming prior encounters, in December 2019, Crimo III passed four background checks to purchase weapons, the Illinois State Police said.

Because he was under the age of 21, his father sponsored his application, and at the time it was reviewed, "there was insufficient basis to establish a clear and present danger and deny the FOID application," the state police said.

The state police said that before they approved Crimo III's FOID application, they reviewed his criminal history and only found a January 2016 ordinance violation for being a minor in possession of tobacco.

Several other police reports between 2009 and 2014 revealed numerous incidents of domestic violence among Crimo III's father, Crimo III's mother and her boyfriend, who is not named.

Among the police reports was a 911 call from Crimo III's mother Denise Pesina-Crimo's boyfriend who alleged she tried to kill herself, which Pesina-Crimo disputed. In another incident, Pesina-Crimo was accused of biting the caller in 2012. In another incident, Pesina-Crimo allegedly struck Crimo III's father with a screwdriver.

Several of these incident reports indicate that the suspect's mother was allegedly intoxicated.

Another police record released on Thursday is a 2002 arrest card for Crimo III's mother for endangering the life of a child, now identified as Crimo III.

Crimo III is accused of opening fire at an Independence Day parade, killing seven people and injuring dozens of others. The suspect plotted another attack in Madison, Wisconsin, authorities said Wednesday, but did not follow through.

He was charged with seven counts of first-degree murder on Tuesday. Prosecutors said that Crimo III confessed to Monday morning's parade massacre. He did not enter a plea during a bond hearing on Wednesday.

HEADLINE	07/07 Federal prison time for Derek Chauvin
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/derek-chauvin-sentenced-federal-charges-violating-george-floyds/story?id=86366456
GIST	<p>Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin has been sentenced to 21 years in prison on federal civil rights charges Thursday in the death of George Floyd.</p> <p>He had previously pleaded not guilty to the charges but in December 2021, he pleaded guilty to violating Floyd's civil rights and admitted that he kept his knee on Floyd's neck even after he became unresponsive.</p> <p>Chauvin's plea agreement called for a 20- to 25-year sentence and for him to serve the federal sentence at the same time as the state one in federal prison, The Associated Press reported.</p> <p>Chauvin also pleaded guilty to depriving a then-14-year-old child of his constitutional right to be free from the use of unreasonable force by an officer, which resulted in bodily injury to the teen, according to the Justice Department.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson made the final decision.</p> <p>In April 2021, Chauvin was also found guilty on three counts in Floyd's death -- second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter -- for pressing his knee against Floyd's neck for more than 9 minutes.</p> <p>He had already been sentenced to 270 months, minus time served, which equals about 22 1/2 years in prison.</p> <p>In a statement, Derrick Johnson, the president of civil rights organization NAACP, called for justice in other instances of police violence in the U.S.</p> <p>"While today's federal sentence for George Floyd's murderer is a step toward accountability, America's policing crisis continues to crush and devastate Black families," Johnson said. "Holding police officers accountable is crucial. But meaningful justice, for the countless Black people murdered by police, is desperately needed. Police should serve and protect, not lynch. We need to reform policing in America."</p> <p>Former officers J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao were also charged for their roles in Floyd's death.</p> <p>The three of them had pleaded not guilty but were convicted by a jury.</p> <p>The four former officers were attempting to place Floyd under arrest on suspicion of using a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes at a convenience store in 2020.</p> <p>During the encounter, Chauvin held his knee on the back of Floyd's neck for more than 9 minutes. Floyd, who was handcuffed and in a prone position on the pavement, repeatedly said he couldn't breathe before falling unconscious and losing a pulse, according to evidence presented at Chauvin's state trial. Floyd was later pronounced dead at a hospital.</p> <p>Thao and Kueng now await a state trial for charges of aiding and abetting in murder and aiding and abetting in manslaughter in Floyd's death. The two have pleaded not guilty.</p> <p>The trial is set to start on Oct. 24.</p> <p>Lane pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter in exchange for the dismissal of the top charge against him of aiding and abetting second-degree unintentional murder.</p>

	Under the agreement, a sentence of 36 months, or three years in prison, will be recommended by both prosecutors and Lane's legal team. If he went to trial and was convicted on both counts, he could have faced a maximum sentence of 40 years in prison, according to the plea agreement.
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